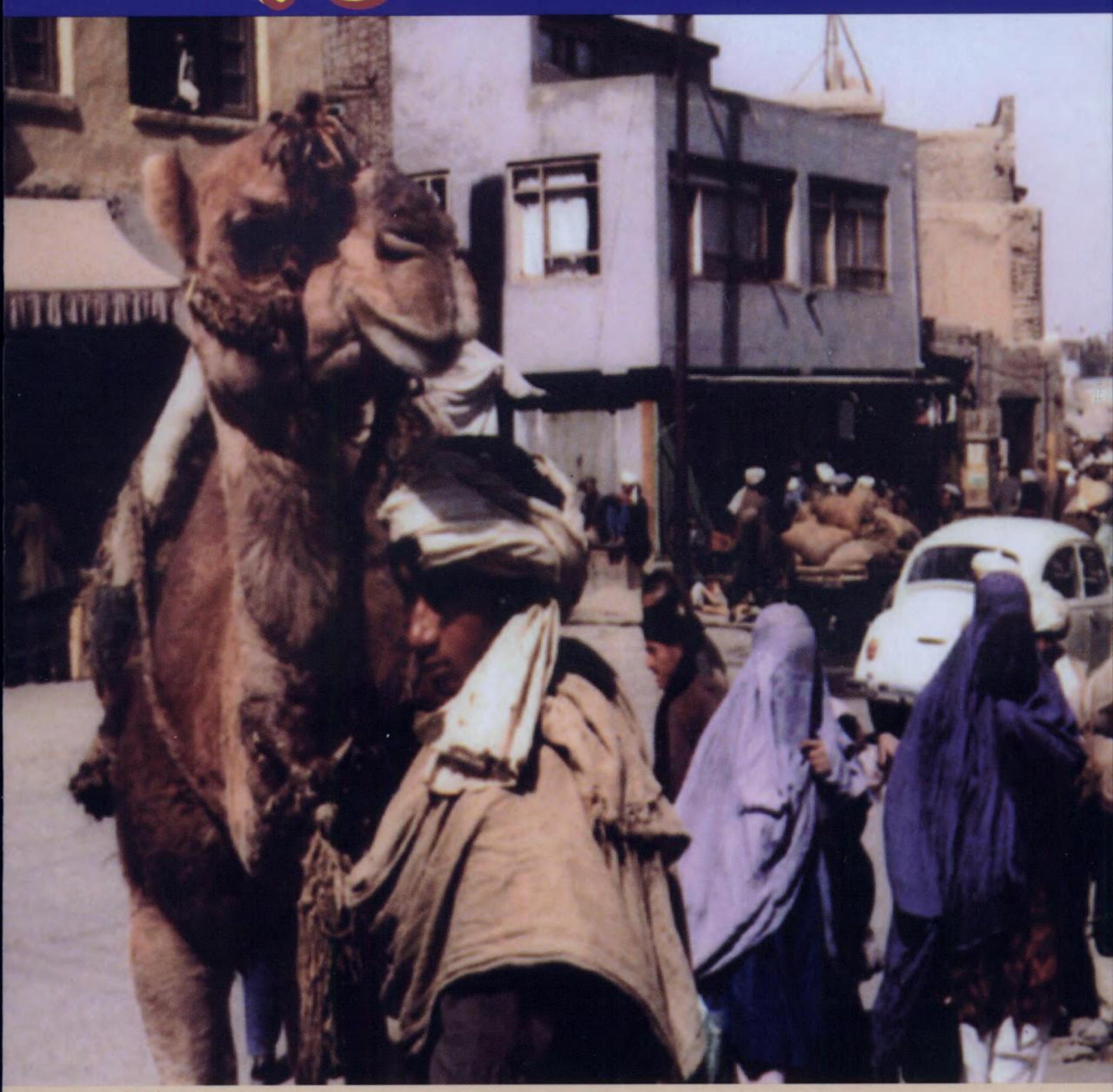
Letters from Afghanistan



Eloise Hanner

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To Mother

Prologue

It was back before the word *Taliban* was part of everyone's vocabulary. No one knew about Afghanistan and no one cared. It was 1971. I was twenty-one years old, just out of college, and together with my husband, Chuck, had just been accepted into a Peace Corps program in Afghanistan. We certainly hadn't requested the location. We had put in our applications nine months before and had written down as first choice – South Pacific. Tropical palms, warm water, it sounded like a good place to be. I don't remember if we chose a second place or not, but it was a surprise to open the big brown envelope that came to our apartment in the spring of 1971 and read that we were invited to participate in the program in Afghanistan. I remember Chuck and I exchanging a blank look. Afghanistan? It didn't sound like an island and the atlas confirmed our suspicions. Afghanistan was about as opposite the South Pacific as one could get—landlocked, in the middle of Asia and had snow in the winter.

Traveling to a far away place was something I had always dreamed of doing. Maybe it came from being raised in the small town of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, but I like to place the blame on Roy Rockwood, author of the little-known series of children's books called *Bomba the Jungle Boy*. *Bomba* was a twelve-year-old Tarzan, who swam through schools of piranhas, escaped poisonous snakes and dodged lethal darts on a daily basis. He made my life in Idaho seem dull indeed. I couldn't put down such *Bomba* classics as *Bomba the Jungle Boy and the River Demons* or *Bomba the Jungle Boy in the Steaming Grotto*. I read them all, twice. I watched National

Geographic specials and yearned to go exploring, but it was hard for me to do much exploring beyond the woods at the end of our street. At twelve I told my mother I wanted to be like Jane Goodall and spend my life observing chimpanzees in Africa. (She was wise enough not to argue the point.) But by twenty, exotic travel had been waylaid by the more practical consideration of graduating from college. I had chosen a major in drama and English and had gone down to the University of Idaho for my final two years. It was in the fall of my senior year when I hurried by a Peace Corps recruiting desk, then returned for a closer look. I didn't consider myself a do-gooder or even especially altruistic, but here was an opportunity to go to an exotic location, have an adventure and maybe do something useful at the same time. It seemed like such a perfect thing to do that I was surprised the desk wasn't jammed with applicants. "Who wouldn't want to go?" I had asked the girl sitting there. She just looked at me and smiled. I gathered up all the brochures and applications at the table and took them under my arm to show my fiancé, Chuck, who was waiting for me in the Student Union building.

"You'll never guess what I've got," I began.

"No, he said. "You'll never guess what I've got!"

"OK, you first." He then proceeded to pull out all the Peace Corps brochures he had just picked up and I burst out laughing. There was no need to sell each other on the project. We ordered coffee and started filling out the applications.

The selection process for the Peace Corps took nine months due to the task of evaluating each application for skills that matched requests from participating countries. We were qualified for little, except to teach English, so a country had to be found that wanted English teachers. During the months that followed, we married, did our student teaching back in Coeur d'Alene, and waited for word from the Peace Corps.

Actually, the envelope we received that morning didn't really invite us to Afghanistan, but invited us to interviews in Chicago to see if we would be accepted for the program in Af-

ghanistan. We were sent there for a weekend of information and interviews, where they first told us all the negative things they could think of, then interviewed us to see if we still were committed. For us, that was like throwing gas on the fire; the harder it sounded, the more we wanted to go. We were given the green light with about two thirds of the group. The others were declined for reasons of unsuitability– which we guessed were hidden agendas of wanting to be missionaries or revolutionaries. The rest of us were sent home and told we had six weeks to get ready to leave. We finished our final weeks of teaching, stored our few possessions in my mother's basement, and then stuffed four suitcases (we were allowed seventy pounds apiece) with clothes we hoped would last us two years. We cleaned the apartment, moved out, sold the car (for $25.00) forwarded our mail to my mother, and waited anxiously to depart.

Until the morning of departure it never occurred to me how difficult it was going to be to say good-bye. I had been so caught up in the preparations and the excitement that it hadn't dawned on me there was a flip side to adventure, which is leaving behind people you love. That morning my excitement had evaporated into a feeling of doom. When it came time for the final 'good-byes', my mother tried to be stoic, but tears began to flow down her cheeks as she implored Chuck to take care of me. Seeing her cry dissolved any resolve I might have had and between sobs I promised her I would write every week. I remember standing there on the front porch, crying and hugging her; then finally breaking away and walking with Chuck to the car, feeling more broken hearted than I had ever been in my life.

I was true to my word about the letters, but unlike today, where my letters are e-mailed in seconds, the letters I sent from Afghanistan took three to six weeks to arrive and were our only communication. It was obviously a time before computers and faxes, but Afghanistan in 1971 was also a time before television and almost before radio. Telephones were few and far

between and as volunteers, normally out of our reach. In the two years we lived there, I was never able to call home. It was as remote as being sent to the moon. My letters were anxiously awaited and passed faithfully between my Mother and my two older sisters, Rita and Linda.

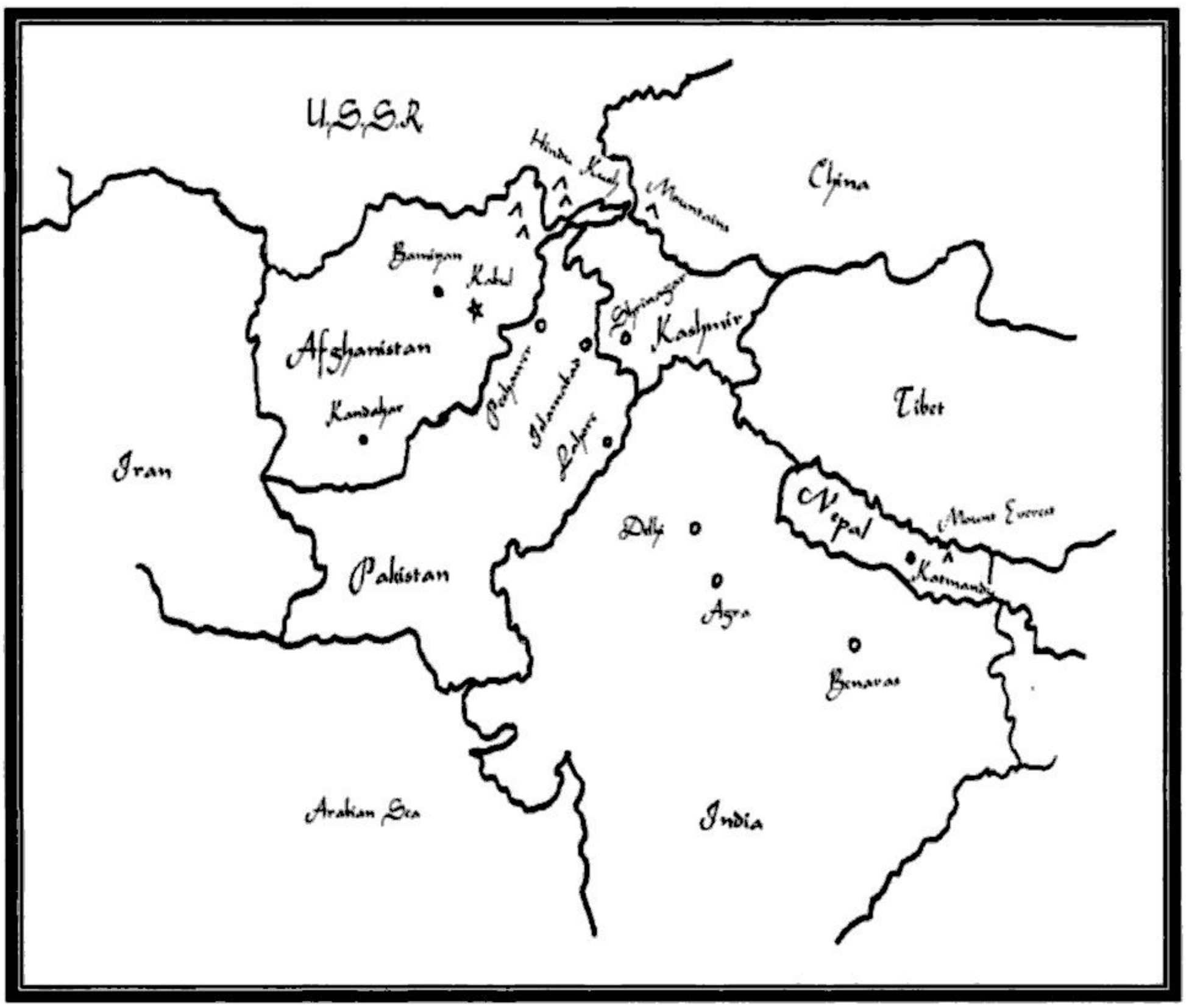
It was Linda, our family's historian, who decided to save them. She presented them to me, bound in a leather notebook, upon my return two years later. I hadn't thought about them in years until 9/11 when Afghanistan suddenly became the center of attention. I mentioned them in passing to my mother during a phone conversation. "You should publish them," she told me. "The people and the customs are the same. Americans should see Afghanistan as it was before the war, maybe they would understand it better." I remember hanging up the phone and going to the bookcase, pulling out the thick album from my bookshelf and blowing the dust off the top. I slowly began to read. I tried to reconcile those letters with the nightly news clips of the bombings and machine-gun toting Afghans. They didn't seem to be the same place or the same people. The news stories were confined to the cruelties imposed upon women by the Taliban and somebody's best guess on the whereabouts of Osama Bin Laden.

There were no films of the amazing bazaars, the Kuchi tribes or the herds of fat-tailed sheep that kicked up dust along our street at dawn. There were no kabob shops or camels or Hazaras pulling heavy loads on their two-wheeled wooden carts. So much was missing. I realized through my letters I could let a reader see Afghanistan through my eyes, and experience as I did, the daily life, with all of its obstacles, all of its incredulity and all of its humor. While the letters gave my family a look at Afghanistan, they also told a larger story, that of our lives as Peace Corps volunteers.

Like our Afghan neighbors, we lived behind high mud walls in an adobe-brick house with a roof that sprouted wheat in the spring and leaked on a regular basis. It was an amazing two

years, filled with such adventure and challenge that I worried the rest of our lives might be anti-climatic.

I closed the album, but I didn't put it away. "Mom's right," I thought, "it's time to read the letters to others and take them on a magic carpet ride, back to a small Islamic kingdom, back to a far away place with a strange sounding name—back to Afghanistan."



Map of the Region

Part 1—The Arrival

July 8, 1971
Dear Mother,

We are here. We are safe. I would say "safe and sound" but I feel a little unsound now, still wobbling from the effects of the plane ride and the latest bout of shots. It was an interminable journey and will take me two years to recover sufficiently to return. I joke, of course, but it did take *forever* to get here. We are part of a group, or a cycle as Peace Corps refers to us, of thirty-five volunteers. This group will become our extended family for the next two years as we will train together and in some cases, work together. Most of us are young couples, but we also have about six single guys, one older single woman and two families with school-age children.

They loaded all of us and some staff personnel in a small chartered plane out of Philadelphia and off we flew towards Afghanistan, stopping for fuel in Greenland, Amsterdam, Germany and Turkey. We had enough time to go downtown in Amsterdam, but then we were sorry we did it. We didn't manage to see anything but masses of tourists and the windows of some exotic looking porno shops. It just made us more tired and we envied the volunteers who had remained curled up and asleep in their airport chairs. Our stops in Germany and Turkey weren't long enough to do much except wander around the airport and get wearier and wearier. After thirty-six hours we finally touched down in Kabul, pronounced *Kaw-bull*, with the accent on the first syllable.

Before we left Philadelphia they handed us our future assignments. Ours read: Ministry of Education—Kabul. My ini-

tial reaction was one of disappointment. A capital city had sounded too modern. As you would expect, I had wanted to be out there living the rugged life, being a pioneer and experiencing a rural existence—rather like the volunteers depicted in the Peace Corps brochures. I had visualized us in a small hut out in the middle of nowhere. Now, after eight hours, I've decided that Kabul will be exotic and primitive enough.

Just getting off the plane and going to the terminal we saw grazing donkeys and two camels. Once inside we got a warm welcome from Peace Corps staff, then were herded through customs and put directly on a bus to take us to the Peace Corps office. No one said a word all the way there; we were too busy staring through the windows trying to take in the first impressions. I saw a bustling city (about a half a million, we were told) that has cars, buses and brightly painted trucks, all more or less driving in the middle of the roads, with donkeys, horse carts, camels, bicycles and pedestrians crowding along the dirt gullies on the sides. There are more buses than cars, all filled to capacity with people literally hanging off the sides and the back. It's noisy, hot and dusty. I haven't seen a thermometer, but my guess is the high 90ies. And there's a sort of sweet, rotting smell that permeates everything. Cars and buses are honking, and some kind of jarring, off-key music is blasted from loudspeakers. We saw some men in suits, but the standard dress seems to be baggy cotton pants, long sleeved shirts, with a vest over the top and turbans with one loose end hanging down on one side. Women have the same mixture of modern and traditional. Some wore modern skirts and blouses, but there were also lots of women, or you supposed they were women anyway, covered almost completely with a drab, pleated garment that has a mesh peek-hole for the eyes. Here they call it the *chadrie*, pronounced *chaud-ree.*

At first glance the downtown part of Kabul seems dirty and forlorn, but relatively up to date. They have buildings of several stories, electric lights, traffic lights, and shops that sell all kinds of electrical goods. There are beggars on the street cor-

ners as well as rolling stands that sell what looks like fruit pop. We passed a couple of small, pathetic parks, with brown grass and a few scraggly trees and finally pulled to a stop in the middle of a block in front of a white building. This was the Peace Corps training center and will be the center of our universe for the next three months.

After an initial welcome from the Peace Corps director, they lined us up for more shots. I made it easier on myself by just telling them that I pass out when I get shots and they said, "fine, lie down." So I did and got the three more. I closed my eyes and think I went to sleep.

We then spent some time learning some basic health measures: don't eat anything from the street vendors, don't eat anything that isn't cooked or can't be peeled, and only drink the water from the Embassy that will be brought to your training house. They taught us a few phrases for directing a taxi, so we can come back here in two days. Such basics such as turn right, turn left, straight ahead, stop and how much. My favorite word is *rubarubaro*, which means "straight ahead." I love the way it rolls off the tongue: Ru-ba-ru-bar-ooooo!

They are housing us with Mike and Elana Hohl, the couple we liked when we met back in Chicago and we will stay with them in some house not too far from here. There is supposed to be a servant waiting for us there who will help with cooking, washing and our survival.

As I sit here and write, I feel like I'm still moving! I'm exhausted, but don't feel sleepy. Can you be too tired to sleep? Must close, they tell me they will post these letters tomorrow. I'll write in a few days.

Love, your youngest daughter

July 13, 1971

Dear Mother,

I suppose my mentioning a servant in the last letter raised your eyebrows. I can hear you thinking, "What is this servant

business? They are in the Peace Corps!" As I shall now explain, it's hardly a luxury, but rather a way to keep us alive.

The house we are in is only about a half a mile from the training center. As with all homes here, it is surrounded by high mud wall and you enter through a small wooden door on one side. This, of course, keeps anyone from seeing "the women" of the house and gives them a little liberty to roam about in their yards. Our yard is small, has a small tree in it, and a well. There's an old outhouse to one side and a shed, where the cooking used to be done. The house is two stories, made of some kind of adobe. The walls have been plastered, the floor is cement and the doors and windows are framed in wood. Lighting is scarce. Each room has one bulb that hangs from the ceiling, no lampshades. Not much in the way of furniture either. We each have a single bed. That's it. No couches, chairs, tables, desks, night stands, shelves or closets. Afghans traditionally sit on the floor using cushions and rugs and now, so do we. Instead of a dining table and chairs we have a cotton throw rug and large, colored pillows to lean against. There really isn't a kitchen, just a small table in a room with a kerosene burner on it, a cupboard and a bucket. Cooking with kerosene makes the house reek of it, but I find I'm already getting used to the smell—better than many around here. Remember the open gullies I mentioned before? They are really open sewers, called *jewies*. They are not quite as awful as they sound, since most homes either use an outhouse or have a septic tank, but still they fill with filthy water and have all sorts of indistinguishable matter rotting away in them. I grimace when I see the children all playing in them. We have the luxury of a flush toilet and running water in the shower, but it's only running by gravity from a tank on the top of the house. There is no city-wide water system. For hot water in the shower we have to make a fire in the wood-burning stove. In the kitchen, we boil it in a small teakettle on the kerosene burner. For drinking water Peace Corps delivers large aluminum tanks of supposedly pure water that come from the American Embassy's well. It's

the only one deep enough to escape contamination by the open sewers.

Our servant's name is Goo-lam. He's about forty, I'm guessing, but looks older due to many wrinkles and missing teeth. He dresses in the traditional Afghan garb, with shoes that all of the poorer class buy from the used shoe bazaar. His are an old dusty pair with pointed toes (from Italy?) and are about two sizes too big. No socks. He shuffles around in them outside, but goes barefoot inside the house. We've noticed that many of the workers and laborers outside have no shoes at all and their feet have thick calluses on the bottom that have deep cracks running through them. They look more like a dried river bottom than they do feet! Goolam has been working for various Americans so he knows a bit of English. That with our growing vocabulary of nouns and verbs allows us to communicate basic needs. Yesterday, we managed to tell him there was a wasp in the living room. He promptly goes in, finds it crawling on the wall and proceeds to smash it with his fist. He then picks it up (quite dead) from the floor, puts it in the palm of his hand for us to see and says "is good." He also rescued us from our botched attempt to light the wood fire for the shower water. Somehow we had put in too much wood and the little dial on the front was way over in the red zone. It had started rumbling and making groaning sounds. "It's going to explode!" I had shouted. Elana and I ran for our beds while Chuck and Mike ran downstairs, found Goolam, pointed upstairs yelling "fire, bathroom, fire!" Goolam proceeded to get a bucket of water, calmly walked upstairs, opened the fire grate with his bare hands and threw in the water. Problem solved. "Is good," he told us.

He is very friendly and does everything he can to keep us fed and functioning. We have no refrigeration of course and with temperatures nearing one hundred every day, he must go daily down to the bazaars and get our vegetables and meat. This chore alone takes a couple of hours. Then he patiently simmers the meat in some kind of stew for us, which takes an-

other couple of hours. And don't ask me what kind of meat. I don't know and don't want to know. So, just getting the "groceries," making lunch and sweeping out the daily dust that is omnipresent, he works about five hours. Since we're in class every day it would be impossible to do both jobs. Goolam doesn't spend the night, but goes home around 4 o'clock and returns in the morning.

We were all sick as dogs after our shots on arrival. Spent the next day flat on our backs in our cots, sweating with fevers and feeling generally lousy. I think both Chuck and I were lying there wondering if we had made a huge mistake in coming here. The next day we were fine and our spirits rose again. We are all are blaming the typhoid shots, especially since we found that every other volunteer also spent the day in bed. Have started into something of a routine now with training. More next letter, am running out of decent light to see this.
Love, your youngest daughter

July 20, 1971
Dearest Mother,

We are beginning to find our way around some of the bazaars. There is an enormous one in the center of town that is an incredible maze of twisting alleys and I doubt if we ever get it totally sorted out. You can find a surprising number of things, if you know where to go. Everything is in a separate shop or open stand in its own peculiar location. Pots and pans? Try the pots and pans bazaar. It's right next to the used shoes, about a half a mile that-a-way and nowhere close to the used clothes! Cloth? Down some other narrow passageway. We have found you need to take a canteen of water and be prepared to spend three or four hours, just to make a purchase of two or three items. And through all the stalls and twisting passages, are masses of people, some with camels or donkeys, dogs running loose, children darting here and there, merchants haggling

prices and various radios blaring Indian music. (That's the discordant noise I heard on the first day!)

We managed to find the cloth bazaar last week and the tailor shops so Chuck had two tunic tops made for me for my birthday! Those, plus some candies we bought, made a lovely birthday. Chuck's new tops for me were especially welcome since we have learned that it is not acceptable for women to tuck in blouses when wearing pants. The Afghans consider it too revealing since you can see the outline of the buttocks. So, when wearing pants, the top must go outside, at least down to midthigh and the blouse or top needs to have sleeves to the elbow. The tunic tops were needed and I'll probably go and get some more made.

Unfortunately, my birthday was the same day we also had to have some more shots, but guess what? I didn't faint! That was a birthday present to myself! I don't think I'm any braver, I'm just getting used to them, as incredible as that seems. So far, we've had nine. They have just started us with a series of three rabies shots, since dogs here can be rabid. And no, you don't have to have them in the stomach. They sting like crazy, I might add.

Peace Corps tells me it isn't necessary to wear a headscarf. With my hair so short, I don't think many people at first glance recognize me as a woman anyway. No woman that they know of would wear her hair this short. Besides, I am always with Chuck, and that's like going with my own personal bodyguard. Although some Afghans are tall, he still towers over many of them. We are always stared at though, and I realize for the first time what it is like to be a minority. I can now sympathize with blacks who find themselves in an all white place, and know that every pair of eyes is upon them.

We're getting good at maneuvering around the city now, using both taxis and buses. The buses are an experience. First of all, they're segregated, women in the front and men in the back. And they are absolutely jammed. The aisles are crammed with people, squishing into each other and in that respect, I'm

glad I'm just pressing into another woman! Men hang off the sides and the back. When it looks like everyone has a handhold of sorts, some man hanging off the back will bang on the side of the bus and shout "*Burro Bachai*" which means "go with God" and off we rumble. Once underway, there's a ticket taker who manages to twist and contort himself through the crowded aisles, smashing us all together even more, to take our grubby coins. By some miracle, he manages to remember who paid the time before, and who just got on–exceptionally difficult, with the women wearing the *chadrie* all looking the same. I've noticed that these women have a tendency to be rude. They can push and shove all they want and can get away with it, because nobody knows who they are! An advantage, if you want to call it that, that I never thought of before. In contrast, when I've had the chance to sit down next to a woman in modern dress, I have found them to be very friendly. In just the length of a bus ride, they invite me to their homes for dinner!

I've now had a chance to examine these *chadries* at close range. They're tight fitting on the top, almost like a skullcap with nice embroidery work all around the head, they then fall in hundreds of tiny accordion pleats from the back and side. The back and sides fall clear to the ground but the front, which isn't pleated, only goes about half way. This allows for walking and maneuverability and the women hold the sides together in front for total coverage. All the pleats allow them to carry bundles underneath. The face part has a small mesh screen for the eyes, but nothing adequate for breathing. They seem to be made of a silky material and have been dyed in a variety of colors, most common being blue, purple, red and green. I wonder if they get to choose their own color, or if that is decided for them as well. Generally the colors are quite drab and faded. I can't say if it's because the dyes are not good or that the *chadrie* is just old.

The bus challenge, in addition to being suffocated, is that with me smashed way up in the front and Chuck smashed way in the back, there's no way we can be sure if we're getting off

at the right stop or if both of us have actually gotten off. When we've gone to new locations, we're not sure where to disembark. So far, when the dust and humanity clears at the stop, we've always found one another, but we have a fall back plan. If one of us gets off and doesn't find the other, the first one is to remain at that stop. Then the second one of us could backtrack and eventually we would find each other. Maybe.

Peace Corps classes are progressing well, but at times your brain just overflows trying to learn a new language. Most of the day is spent studying Farsi (that's the Afghan version of Persian) with breaks where we learn more about the culture. A little bit of time is dedicated to English teaching methods. We will either be teaching English at a boy's school or running an English program in one of the Ministries. Either assignment would be OK.

Initially, they are not teaching us to read or write, but just to speak and have workable conversational skills. I was amazed to learn that Persian is actually a branch off of the Latin side of the language tree. Many words sound like Spanish. The alphabet, while it looks odd, is actually simple. Every character is a sound, and unlike English, the sound never changes. It reads right to left and all books begin at what we would consider the back and the pages flip to the right. Arabic, which uses the same alphabet, albeit a few more flourishes and accents, is a completely different language and has nothing in common with Persian. It's all rather interesting, makes me wish I had studied linguistics in college.

Oh, and speaking of birthdays, Linda's is coming up! I would like to send something small, but difficulties abound. First I need to find a gift, then figure out how to wrap it and where to find something to wrap it in, then find a post office. May have to just settle for a birthday letter this year.
Love, your youngest daughter.

July 28, 1971
Dear Mother,

"Earthquake"

"Earthquake?"

"EARTHQUAKE!!" That was our pre-dawn conversation this morning! However, by the time we sat up and realized it really was an earthquake, it was over. We went out into the hall, ran into Mike and Elana and after a brief inspection, decided that no damage had been done. That's the nice thing about having no furniture and no possessions. Our simple collection of plates, cups and bowls were fine. We traipsed back to our rooms and lay back down on our beds, but it was no use going back to sleep. Besides it was almost five. At 5:30 all the sheepherders come down our street to wake us anyway. Goolam usually comes about that time; we have breakfast a little after six and walk down to the Peace Corps office to start classes at 7:00. At class we learned these "little" earthquakes rumble through here all the time and haven't seemed to cause any damage, at least not in the memory of the staff. They all found it quite funny that we were so wide-eyed about the whole thing. We have much less faith than they do in adobe construction!

And while I'm mentioning sheep, the sheep here are a kind I've never seen before, called fat-tail sheep. The tail is a big lobe, up to two feet long (almost dragging the ground) and maybe a foot or so wide. It stores fat for lean times, which I'm sure they have, given the scarcity of anything green.

We seem to have a continual case of "Montezuma's Revenge." Here they call it the "Kabul Trotts." The Doctor tells us that it is normal to have some as we are getting a new set of Asian bacteria in our systems. However, we have heard from many sources, that it will be a more or less permanent state while we are here. Come to think of it, I haven't seen a fat American since I've been here. In the same medical lecture, we were shown a large glass jug, about the size of a giant Clorox bottle filled with something white. We all got to go up for a

closer look and discovered that the "white" was a worm, God-knows-how-long, that just wound round and round and round, filling the whole jug! "This worm," the doctor told us, "is found only in the fish here in the lakes of Afghanistan, and is believed to be the world's longest. Please be sure all fish you eat is thoroughly cooked." Chuck and I exchanged a glance. I plan to be *surer* than that by not eating ANY Afghan fish while I'm here. Not that you would be tempted. The only ones we've seen have been hanging outside in the "fish bazaar" and you can smell them down the block.

We haven't been able to meet too many Afghans other than our teachers and Goolam. We're kept too busy with classes to get out much and since every house is a walled compound, it doesn't lend to conversations across the backyard fence! And, at this point, we could hardly converse anyway. We have been able to carry out simple buying transactions with the merchants and they have been friendly and anxious to please. So far the only hostility comes from bands of children, (mostly boys) who will run after you in the bazaar shrieking "*jhor ah gee*" which means foreigner, but with a worse connotation, more like "infidel." If you turn around to confront them, they hold out their hands for coins. We've already decided it's not a good idea to give them anything. If you do, they just press for more and continue at your heels, shrieking even louder.

I seem to be getting less static than some of the women in our group and a big part of that seems to be the result of having short brown hair. The Van Gelders, one of the families here, all have very blond curly hair. They have three daughters and a son and all the women report being hissed at in the bazaar and having pebbles thrown at them. They wear head scarfs, but it doesn't seem to make things better.

While our Afghan social circle hasn't taken off, we are becoming good friends with many of the other volunteers. Most of our group consists of married couples our age, but there are two families, the Van Gelders, whom I mentioned, and the Jacksons, plus several single men and a couple of older single

women. It is considered too dangerous and too inappropriate to send young single women. Maybe it's inappropriate to send single men since they all have to resign themselves to a non-dating lifestyle. Dating, as we know it, doesn't exist and from we have learned, most Moslem families would not be excited about having their daughter marry out of the faith. Most of the volunteers will be in Kabul with us and are in our language classes learning Farsi. The volunteers going south are learning Pushtu. The country has real difference from north to south, the North being a four-season climate and the South being more of a desert. Farsi and Pushtu are the respective languages of the regions, but there are roving tribes that are all over the place, speaking a variety of dialects.

We were taken on a field trip yesterday, to the King's Gardens outside of the city. Civilization falls off steeply once outside the city limits. Women are washing their clothes in the river and farmers are out in fields, throwing up wheat with primitive wooden pitchforks, I presume to separate the wheat from the chaff? The dwellings or what we can see of them, are small and brown—dirt compounds that look melted down from rain and snow. As we neared the Gardens we passed a golf course (of all things!) but all of us failed to recognize it until our teacher pointed to a small red flag on a pole, sticking out of a hole. That was your only clue. The rest just looked like a mowed field, where some crop had been recently harvested. The King's Gardens were about ten miles out of town and definitely had more grass and trees than anything we had seen before, but lacked the lushness of what we would expect in a park. Our city park in Coeur d'Alene, for example, would put this to shame. But here, water is scarce and great effort has gone into keeping this spot relatively green. Since no one here has seen anything finer, they think this is the prettiest place and nicest park one could have. I certainly wouldn't want to tell them anything different. The gardens are higher than the city, so it provided a view of the Hindu Kush (foothills of the Himalayans) in the distance that was quite stunning. Must admit, we

don't have that at home! It's also odd, but I've noticed the sky here seems bluer. I don't know if it's less pollution or the fact that the brown hills around Kabul make such a contrast to the sky, but at times, the brown hills and deep blue sky are striking and surprisingly beautiful.
Much love, Your youngest daughter.

P.S. I got your letter!!! And how wonderful it was. I'm so pleased that your tomatoes are getting so big. Wish you could send me one! I could just eat it and not have to soak it in iodine, then peel it!

August 8, 1971
Dear Mother,

We found a can of bug spray in the bazaar and bought it for Goolam. At the next wasp sighting, he takes the can, sneaks up to the wasp on the wall, puts the nozzle of the can right on the wasp itself and presses the button. The velocity of the spray gave him quite a start and he jumped back and started laughing. I'm sure he though it was a pretty funny way to kill a bug, but we noticed by the time we got back for lunch, he had mastered the art, and was spraying up a storm.

You wouldn't be able to buy enough spray for the flies, but we have learned how to cope. The old fashioned fly strips work quite well and we now have a couple hanging over the dining rug. You might think it's disgusting to have all those dead flies hanging over your food, but believe me, better hanging-over than sitting-on! Plus, we learned in class that if you keep the top of a window cracked open about an inch, they will all crawl up the window and fly out. We've taken to doing that, and it's working well.

Speaking of bugs, on our walk home last week, Chuck suddenly let out a yowl and practically collapsed next to me. Something had bitten his foot, on or around his big toe, but we couldn't see any insect around, nor see any exact bite mark.

He limped home, fortunately we were almost there, and we put some cool rags on his toe and propped it up. It was the beginning of the weekend, Thursday afternoon, (Friday is the Holy Day here) so we reasoned it wasn't worth trying to go back to the Peace Corps office only to find the place all locked up. It didn't seem that drastic so we decided just to wait and see the doctor on Saturday. By that afternoon, his whole foot was swollen and by that evening the swelling had progressed to his ankle. We were both starting to get alarmed, but there wasn't much we could do at that point. By morning, it hadn't gone any higher, which was a relief, but I was feeling very stupid and remorseful for not having gone for help when it happened. What if it had gotten worse! I still feel terrible about it. When he limped back on Saturday, Dr. Rollins said there was nothing we could do at this point but relieve symptoms, with keeping it up and taking some anti-inflammatory pills. We're guessing it might have been a scorpion that had somehow gotten on his sandal? Or maybe a vicious ant? They are huge here. He is much better now, but still has swelling in the foot especially around the big toe. He says he's "fine." Right!

Elana and I have decided to hire a *dubie,* which is someone to wash the clothes. This doesn't fall under Goolam's job description, so we had been trying to do it ourselves. Using a bucket for a sink, however, makes the job difficult. It's not so bad with underwear, but jeans are impossible. I put mine in the bucket, filled it with soapy water and then took off my sandles and stepped in, squishing away as best I could. But then it took buckets more to rinse and in an hour, I had done only our jeans. Labor is cheap, along with everything else, so we've decided having someone else do it would be a big time saver. See how spoiled I'm becoming? First a servant, and now–laundry service!

Love, Your youngest and most pampered daughter!

August 16, 1971
Dear Mother,

It has been a discouraging week. It's been incredibly hot and for the last two days I haven't been able to keep much down. That with the ongoing diarrhea has keep me running to the bathroom. Our well went dry, on the weekend of course, so we were stranded without shower water or water to flush the toilet. Fortunately (a matter of debate) we still have the outhouse. The lack of water, even for two days is especially bad since we've been having these awful dust storms every afternoon that grind dust in your skin, your eyebrows and your hair and, of course, every surface in the house. Elana and I have tried sweeping with our little broom (looks exactly like an old witch's broom) but I think we just stir it up and make it worse. We all have had short tempers lately and find ourselves snapping at each other over trivialities. We all can't wait to get to our own places.

Of course no matter how uncomfortable I might feel, all I have to do is look out on the street to realize that I'm being a baby and a spoiled American. Having diarrhea and a dry well wouldn't even register as a problem for most of these people. We at least *have* a well. Yesterday, two Kuchi women knocked at our door. The Kuchis are a nomadic tribe, the ones that Mitchner fictionalizes in *Caravans*, and they travel continually across the country with caravans of camels and herds of sheep. Kuchi women don't wear the *chadrie*; it has never been their custom. Instead, they wear brightly colored dresses and shawls (often red) and they pull the shawl up to cover their heads. They love jewelry and have all manner of dangling bracelets, ankle bracelets, necklaces, rings, earrings, nose-rings and often headbands of coins and small pendants. They jingle as they walk along—usually barefoot. The two women that appeared at our door were less adorned, but did have wrist and ankle bracelets. They wanted to cut our grass—not for money, but to take the grass and feed their sheep! Our grass isn't much.

Maybe a scraggly patch about fifteen by twenty feet. We said yes (why not?) and let them in through the outside gate. Then, to our amazement, they proceeded to get down on their hands and knees and yank out the grass by hand! One woman looked to be forty or so and the other woman was young, probably still in her teens. It made your heart sink to watch them. After an hour or so in the killing sun, they gathered up the pitiful little bundles of grass and left. It depressed me for the rest of the day.

You were asking about our diet? It's pretty good, actually. Rice is the staple here and lamb is the most common meat. Except you can't call it lamb, since I think they kill the sheep only when they're on death's door or maybe they just drag in the recently dead. Hard to say! Mutton, I believe, *would* be a better description. Actually, by the time Goolam boils it to death, it doesn't have much taste one way or another. He cooks everything for hours, on Peace Corps orders, to try and keep us as healthy as possible. As I have related, this program has only met with partial success. There is a wide variety of vegetables and fruits but we can only eat what can be peeled and even then, we have to soak it in iodine water first. They make a variety of yogurt sauces often with cucumbers, and there's even a wonderful yogurt based soup. The most common hot dish is *pilau* which is a huge mound of rice, filled with pieces of mutton, (if the person has money) slivers of carrots, raisins, and sometimes nuts. It's quite good. The one thing I've developed a complete passion for, though, is the bread–a long, flat piece called *non* that is cooked in earth ovens. It's odd looking, sort of like a pizza crust that is two feet long, ten inches wide, golden brown with narrow little cuts running the length and breath of it. There are *non*-cookeries (the word bakery doesn't give the right image) in almost every neighborhood and the local one was pleased to show us his operation. Inside an open-air construction (a three-walled shack) is what looks like a deep well. Except at the bottom there is a burning hot fire and the sides are a type of baked clay. I lost a bit in translation

there. The sides might just be regular dirt that has baked—don't know. But at any rate, the baker is wrapped up in yards of white cotton, from his head to his toes, with only a tiny slit for his eyes–exactly like a mummy. Thus protected from the heat, he proceeds to lean down into the pit and slap the dough on the sides of the wall. It sticks to the sides of the wall and cooks. When it's done, he reaches back down into the inferno with a hook and fetches it out. I can't begin to tell you how hot it was. We couldn't even get near the well to peek down and never did figure out how the little slots are made. How the man manages to sit there, wrapped up like a giant hot-pad in sweltering heat and then lean back and forth into the fire pit is beyond me. We couldn't even bear to stand near the place!

Goolam brings us our *non* just before lunch and we often eat it while it's still hot. It has a wonderful flavor, like nothing you've ever tasted and has a great chewy texture. People buy the bread daily and always carry it home wrapped in a white scarf, a tradition started for cleanliness and a holy reference to bread.

All this talk of food is making me hungry and dinner is almost ready.
Love, your youngest daughter.

August 23, 1971
Dearest Mother,

Well, well, we have a new well! The landlord decided that the old one was kaput so he had a team of workers come in and dig a new one while we were in class. By our return in the afternoon we had a new well and gushing water! Praise be to Allah.

For a treat, we decided to go and have dinner out There are several nice restaurants around and we decided to take a taxi (more splurging) and go to the Baga Bali, which was an old palace of the King's that has been converted to a restaurant. It sits on top of a small hill surrounded by gardens and has an old

swimming pool just beyond the patio. The pool is still filled with water, but nothing that anyone could swim in. It was so brown you couldn't see the bottom and had bits of garbage floating around. However, from a slight distance and at night, it looked quite romantic. We felt decidedly elegant.

We also made an excursion to the Kabul Zoo. What can I say? They're trying, but it's the worst. Chuck thought all the animals there (and happily there weren't many) looked like they wanted to die. And the stench was overwhelming. I think the best solution would be to shoot them. You could also let them go, and then someone else would shoot them and eat them.

We are almost finished with training! Hooray a thousand times over! Sitting all day in a hot classroom, struggling to cram your brain with Farsi has made a long and tedious summer. We can make ourselves understood quite well now, but I find the real challenge is in listening comprehension. When we speak, many Afghans think we're better than we really are, then start rattling back at us in rapid-fire conversation. I think my most common phrase has become "speak slowly, please." We now have our future assignment—teaching English to the employees at the Ministry of Finance. It seems all the educated Afghans want to learn English, recognizing that it's the international business language. But, more specifically, there are many scholarships that these employees can qualify for if they can pass the English exam, which allows them to study abroad in England, Canada and the U.S. Getting us ready for our assignments, we now are doing language and culture in the mornings and student teaching in the afternoons at the University. We were a bit intimidated at first, thinking this was going to be way beyond our level, but we need not have worried. Chuck hit the mark pretty well when he described the University as "funk city." The physical facility is OK, but there is no organization, no place to get books, and between the teachers and students there is always a strike going on—teachers striking for decent pay and supplies, students striking for more

teachers and schedules. Students were ecstatic about having us there to teach English, and didn't care about the lack of books. They are unfailingly polite and jump up and stand at attention when we enter the room. Teachers have a very high social status here and are treated with the highest respect. Many of the students, even on just meeting us for the first time, have asked us to come to their homes for dinner.

On our day off last week we decided to take a short trip out of town with some fellow volunteers for a hike up in the mountains outside of Kabul. We left with Gary Fair, Art Panaro, and the Rob and Judy Stigger and caught a ride up to Salang Pass. With no trains and no exact bus schedules to leave town, you just hang around the road leading out of town and arrange a ride in the back of the next truck or *lorry* going your direction. These trucks are kaleidoscopes of color. Inside and out, they are painted or upholstered with geometric mosaics of every color. There are colorful tassels hanging from every place you can hang something and any space that might have been missed is covered with small mirrors, reflecting even more color. One, I noticed, had even wrapped and decorated the gearshift and steering column! It goes without saying that there are ornaments hanging off the rear view mirror!

We negotiated the fare, which was cheap, hopped in the back and rumbled off in a choking blast of diesel smoke. We faced backwards, leaning against the cab of the truck, which was much less stressful than looking forward. These two-way roads are narrow and twisting, with chilling drop-offs and no guardrails. The truck drivers on both sides generally drive in the middle of the road. When they come to a curve they can't see around, which is about every other minute, they just lay on the horn to warn any one approaching from the other side. Those on the other side are doing the same thing. So you can't stand to watch and can barely stand to hear. You pray you don't hear two horns at the same time! We reached our destination in a little over an hour and climbed out, thankful to still be alive. We were near the top of the pass, at about thirteen thou-

sand feet and it was downright chilly. We had already put on our jackets in the truck so took off at a brisk pace, following directions and Gary's map. It took about an hour to hike to our destination–a small, very clear lake where we sat down and had a picnic of cold kabobs, nuts and water. Hiking or even walking put us out of breath. I don't think I've ever been that high before and was amazed to find what it did to our energy and breathing abilities. When we made our way back around to the main highway we found ourselves on a little cliff, (about fifty feet) with no apparent way to get down. Chuck spotted a cable running down the side of it and came up with the clever idea of putting our socks on our hands for protection and sliding down the cable. We all managed this feat, even Art, who had more trepidation (and sense) than the rest of us. All and all, an exhilarating day and a welcome break from hot and dusty Kabul.

Love, your youngest daughter.

P.S. I won't be able to send birthday presents, the cost to send them would be more than the present, but be patient, I will try to send home a box for Christmas. It will have to go surface mail (takes up to six months) since airmail is way too expensive. So, if I get something to you in September, MAYBE it will be there by Easter. Perhaps they are exaggerating and it will arrive sooner, but I wouldn't place any bets. You asked what we needed? I'll send a list in the next letter.

August 28
Dearest Mother,

We're on the home stretch of training now, only a few days left of classes, followed by a week break, then we're sworn in as volunteers—*enshalla*! *Enshalla* means "if God wills it" and is used here after practically every sentence in the future tense. It makes a great excuse for just about everything. If someone says they'll be somewhere or do something next week *en-*

shalla, and they don't show up or do the appointed task, well, then, it was God's will! End of problem. So, we'll finish training, *enshalla,* but plan to continue with a tutor to keep improving on our Farsi. We do pretty well, but still have a long ways to go to approach fluency.

Most exciting news—we have found our new home! We thought this might consume our entire week off, since the only way you can find a house is to walk up and down neighborhoods looking for the sign "Tolet" (spelled as one word) on the door of a compound wall. It's usually in English since foreigners are the only ones renting anything. We ran into some volunteers, Donna and Jim Kistler, who told us that the house next to them was available. They had looked at it a year ago and remembered it as being quite nice. They decided on the one next door, since it had a bigger back yard and she keeps a horse back there! We hustled right over, met the landlord and got the key to take a look. Of course, here, you don't just "get the key." We were invited in, had quite formal introductions, then sat down to partake in some tea and cookies. Afghans are the ultimate in politeness and hospitality and it would be rude to just come and get something without spending some time and taking refreshments. Anyway, we finally made it over to the house and loved it at first sight. Like all places, it is surrounded by a twelve-foot wall and has a small yard in front and an old falling-apart house in the back that will make a good woodshed. It has a bank of windows across the entire front living room with a wide window-seat, about a foot high, the same length as the windows. Even bare, the room was sunny and cheerful. There is a small bathroom (with the same water set-up as our training house) and two bedrooms. There is also a room that can be used as a dining room. The only thing missing is a kitchen (can't have EVERYTHING!) but we believe we can convert one of the bedrooms to a primitive kitchen, so think that will solve that problem. Walls are adobe, floor is cement but ceilings are wood. It needs cleaning, drapes, cabinets and furniture, but the layout is good and so is the rent–district called Karte Char, across town from where we

district called Karte Char, across town from where we are now, but only a bus ride away from the Ministry where we'll be working, or we can ride bikes. It will be wonderful having the Kislers as our neighbors and we know of several other volunteers who are looking at rentals in that section of town. We get an extra months salary called a "housing allowance" that will give us enough money to furnish the place, on a modest level, of course. Can't wait to get started.

This next week is the Jashin Isteqlal, the Afghan independence festival, and we've been advised that it's best to get out of town. Kabul becomes crowded and a sort of nationalistic mob psychology takes over; as a foreigner, it pays to keep a low profile. So, with the house-hunting project out of the way, we have decided to take a short trip over to the Bamiyan Valley. You've seen pictures of this valley; it's the one with the giant Buddha statue in the wall of a mountain. Actually there are two. Originally, the valley was a Buddhist cultural and religious center populated by hundreds of Buddhist priests. Centuries later, when the Moslems arrived, they found the statues an affront to Islam and destroyed as much of them as they could. Still, they say what remains makes a pretty impressive sight, so we're anxious to take a look. I'm taking lots of pictures, but am not sure where I should get them developed, IF I can get them developed. Given our nerve-wracking experience on the lorry, we are going to try to fly over there.

I know this letter is short, but need to get organized for our journey. Oh, one thing definitely you can send me—a calendar. The Afghans use the Moslem lunar calendar, which is currently 1350 A.M. (after Mohammed). We joke of course, that the place *is* about 1350. Also, salad dressing mixes, a pair of clip-on sunglasses (don't exist here) and maybe a good paperback book.

Love and kisses, your youngest daughter

P.S. I'm glad your cucumbers and onions are doing so well—you must have enough salad for the entire neighborhood. Good

luck with your new school year, I suspect you'll be heading back this next week.

September 7, 1971

Dear Mother,

We had a fabulous vacation! We were able to catch a tiny plane over to the valley–$2.50 per person each way, almost as cheap as a lorry. There had been some mix up as to how many passengers were going and as we sat on the runway, there ensued a terrific argument on the runway between the pilot and the reservations clerk. We were finally told that yes, we were all going, but they were dumping fuel out on the runway first, to make the plane lighter. You would think they might have wanted to save it and put it in a barrel, but no, they just poured it out on the ground and we were off. The plane was tiny and we could easily see into the cockpit. It was both amusing and horrifying to see that the map they had was a one used by children in geography classes—you know the kind, ones with little pictures of cows in the flat lands and sheep in the mountains. Despite that, we did make it to Bamiyan and flying in was spectacular. You go over countless brown mountains and suddenly find yourself in this green valley—a Shangri-La, and a feast for the eyes after brown Kabul. On one side are majestic cliffs where the giant Buddhas are carved, one on each end of the valley. They are so enormous and striking—like giant sentinels guarding a sacred place. In between are thousands of small caves where we were told the Buddhist monks and priests once lived. No one lives in them now. The view is spectacular, even with the statues defaced. It would be worth coming to Afghanistan for this sight alone. They say when they were built they were covered with gold and decorated with precious gems that "dazzled the eye." It's hard to imagine just how spectacular that must have been.

There is a nice hotel in Bamiyan, but way beyond our price level, so we rented a tent and camped instead. This worked nicely since the hotel had a camp ground with outdoor bathrooms. We spent all morning crawling around the largest Buddha, one hundred and ninety feet high. There are no guardrails, no restrictions and no one about, so you can go wherever you have the courage to go. We climbed up on the top of the head and looked out at the valley, taking care not to get too close to the edge. Chuck came to the conclusion that he doesn't like heights. I decided that I don't mind heights, but I don't like edges! We explored all around and went over the bottom and poked about in many of the caves, although there's not much in them. Chuck got a great picture of me waving my hat at the foot of the Buddha that will give you an idea of the immensity of the statue. In the afternoon we went over to an opposite hill where there are ruins of an ancient city that was completely destroyed by Genghis Khan, back in 1222, in retaliation for his grandson being killed in some other battle. The city afterwards was called Shahr-I-Gholghola meaning the City of Noise—so named for the shrieking of all the dying citizens that were run through with the sword. It was eerie to stand there on such a pleasant, sunny afternoon, and think of the blood and agony that had taken place under our feet. All of this history is so incredible. How did I get all the way through school without ever learning anything about it? That night we saw the most amazing star-filled sky, the milky way appearing as a bright band and an entire sky with absolutely millions of twinkling stars, more than I've ever seen or thought possible. It was the sky of our ancestors, before electricity (only the hotel has a few lights going) and pollution. It took your breath away.

We hadn't planned on the night star-watching expedition, but I had had a terrible bout of diarrhea. Worse than terrible, actually. A "wave" came over me about midnight and as I scrambled for my clothes to make a dash, it was suddenly too late. Now this is when you test the love of your husband. I had only brought one pair of pants, my jeans, so Chuck had to take

them, reeking and disgusting, and go and wash them for me in the small sink in the bathroom, while I, wrapped in my sleeping bag, propped up outside the tent and admired the night sky. I think I owe him big time. But we did see the fabulous night sky and as they say, "it's an ill wind that doesn't blow someone some good!" The nights here are chilly, so in the morning the jeans were still quite wet, but I had to put them on and make the best of it. Believe me, that's the LAST time I will ever travel in Asia with only one pair of pants!

I felt fairly good the next morning so we decided to catch a lorry for a three hour ride up to Bandiamir, to see a series of seven lakes that are claimed to be spectacular and some of the highest lakes in the world. We ran into Charlie Motsch, from our Peace Corps group, and the three of us decided to go together. I must digress a minute and tell you about Charlie, who keeps us laughing continually. Charlie is an older, single man, about 50(?) who had been in Afghanistan some twenty or thirty years ago. On the plane from Philadelphia he kept telling us he was "coming home" and went on for as long as anyone would listen, about how great Afghanistan was, how beautiful, etc. etc. I think Charlie just remembered everything good and forgot everything bad, as people are wont to do when looking backwards. Anyway, since his arrival, nothing, of course, measures up to what it was in his memory, so he is continually complaining, but in a very funny way. He uses a dry sarcasm and even when he's serious, we find ourselves laughing. Every time we encounter a difficulty, we laugh about how it will affect poor Charlie.

When we jumped in the back of the lorry, along with several Afghan men, we made the mistake of not taking our jackets. It was warm and pleasant in the valley, but we keep forgetting that when you go UP it gets COLDER. Well, we won't forget again. It was a freezing ride in the back of the truck and the three of us had to snuggle together, best we could, to stay warm. And I learned a little something about the turbans all the men wear. The dust was kicking up somewhat fierce and all the

Afghan men took that long end piece of their turbans and wrapped it around their faces. We foreigners, the educated, *turbanless* ones, just kept choking the dust down! On the plus side, the road wasn't as scary as our trip to the Salang Pass and had great scenery. Not the least of which were a couple of Kuchi caravans, coming along with all the camels, and donkeys and the colorful dress as I had described to you before. It's as though you had gone back in some time machine. Unfortunately, I had not recovered from whatever I had had the night before, so about every thirty minutes we would have to bang on the truck window to have him stop. There wasn't a bush in sight, so my best recourse was to just crouch behind the wheels of the truck. Pretty dreadful, but there were no options.

When we finally got to the lakes, I decided I felt much better in a horizontal position than a vertical one, so found a big flat rock and lay down on it for the rest of the afternoon. I was able to look around a bit though and must say that the lakes were outstanding–the deepest, more gorgeous blue I have ever seen and worth the trip, which says something right there. Even Charlie wasn't disappointed. Chuck went off to explore around and after awhile came back with a wonderful Afghan man named Mr.Nuri. Chuck had explained to Mr.Nuri how I wasn't doing so well and Mr.Nuri said no-question-about-it, we would ride back down with him, in his car, and if we would like, he would drive us all the way back to Kabul the following day. He offered the ride to Charlie as well, but Charlie wanted to stay longer and decided to find a lorry back. It seems every time we meet an Afghan they fall all over themselves in hospitality and generosity. We took him up on his offer and got a ride back to our tent in relative comfort. I didn't even have to stop!

The adventures continued the next day, but I'm too pooped (both meanings of the word!) to go on. Will have to continue in the next letter.

Much love, your youngest daughter

P.S. I can just imagine how pretty your begonias look out on the front porch. I wish I had brought pictures of home to share with new Afghan friends here.

September 12, 1971

Dear Mother,

It's almost Linda's birthday. I have written her a separate birthday letter, hope it arrives in time. By the way, this is my tenth letter, have you received all of them? And, I found out that surface mail takes only two months, but your package must weigh under ten pounds.

Now, let's see, where was I? Oh yes, the trip home. We decided to take Mr. Nuri up on his offer, reasoning that maybe in a car, the trip wouldn't be too bad. Mistake number one. It was a ten hour trip (only 114 miles) over the worst roads I could imagine. The first SIX hours were on a twisting dirt road that caved in and disappeared about half the time, sometimes perilously close to sheer drop-offs. There were several times when I know my heart absolutely stopped. The dust was suffocating and the closer we got to Kabul the hotter it became so we had to leave all the windows open. There wasn't an inch of us that wasn't covered with dirt. When I finally took off my glasses to clean them, Chuck burst out laughing. Said I looked like a raccoon in reverse, with a white mask around my eyes where my glasses had been. We had Mr. Nuri let us off in Charie-Kar, outside of Kabul and the plan was to get a hotel for the night. It was still our vacation and we had heard that there was an OK hostel in that village. Mistake number two. Even though we were exhausted and filthy, we weren't desperate enough to stay in that hovel! Instead, we caught a local bus, which proceeded to break down and take two hours to go about ten miles. We finally made it to a small village called Paghman, which is also outside of Kabul. Paghman wasn't a mistake. It had a wonderful little hotel, set in some beautiful gardens (by anyone's standards) with flowers and greenery everywhere you looked. The

service was exceptional, especially since we were the only guests! Everyone else had gone to Kabul for family celebrations. Because everything is heated with wood, a servant came to us right away to ask at what time we wanted our showers, (ASAP, PLEASE) so he could start the wood stove and when would we like dinner, again to make the long preparations. Every time we sat on the little patio, someone would come running to see if we needed tea or cookies.

The following morning, we met another wonderful Afghan man at the hotel, who had stopped by with his children just for breakfast. His name is Akbar Azam (great name, don't you think?) and he owns a shoe factory in Kabul. He speaks German, French, English and of course, Farsi. His children were a delight—so sweet and shy and so cute and the blackest button eyes. Akbar went on to tell us that things weren't looking up for him—lots of problems at this shoe factory and his German wife hates it here and maybe hates him too. Poor guy was really looking for a sympathetic ear and we were happy to oblige. We were preparing to depart and catch the bus but he insisted on taking us, so we got a door-to-door delivery. He wants us to come for lunch next week.

After we got back to Kabul, we became official volunteers! We had a swearing–in ceremony and bid farewell to our hard-working teachers. Can't remember exactly what I swore to, but the general gist was to be good and to do good. It was sad to leave our Afghan teachers. We may still run into them, but once you are out of the training program, it's hard to visit since they will be in classes with new volunteers. They were all excellent and very patient and have managed to get us all to a simple speaking ability, plus we've learned the alphabet and can do simple reading. We plan to actively continue our studies and hopefully be more conversational this time next year. We didn't linger after the ceremony but went straight to our new place and started cleaning.

Getting the house ready has been a challenge. First came the clean up. That mostly consisted of cleaning the bathroom and

the floors. You can buy bleach and scouring powder and brushes, so all you have to add is elbow grease! There is no shower, by the way, but we plan to have one made and will just take bucket showers in the meantime. (There is a drain in the floor.) After the cleaning, we hired the mat-making men to make wall-to-wall straw mats in the dining room and living room. This is common practice for the cement floors and is the most amazing process.

Three men came to the house hauling a huge cartload of straw strips about a yard long and an inch wide. They unloaded the whole cart in the living room and starting at one end, began hand weaving the stuff together going exactly around the corners and making a binding edge along the walls. By the afternoon, we had our wall-to-wall mats. We will throw some colorful cotton rugs on top and that will be "the carpet." We left the cement floor in the new kitchen, in the hall and bathroom and bedroom, as it makes for easier and better cleaning. The bedroom is so small that after we get a bed in there, there really isn't going to be enough space to worry about. We'll throw down a cotton rug just to protect our bare feet from that cold cement in the winter.

The next big project was our kitchen. We found the carpentry bazaar and are having (not done yet) cabinets made for one side. The other wall has a small table with a two-burner kerosene stove that resembles our old Coleman camping stove. The oven rests in the corner. Let me explain. All the oven is, is a tin box with a top and four sides—the bottom is open. Inside there is a rack. Outside there are two handles on either end. To use the *oven*, you pick it up and set it over the 2 kerosene burners and then turn the burners on. It even has a little gauge in front for the temperature, but I doubt if it's very accurate. Donna (next door) assures me that these tin boxes work just fine and she bakes breads, cakes and I-don't-know-what-all in hers with great success. As an added cooking convenience we also plan to buy a little electric burner to use when we just need to heat up something and don't want to mess with the kerosene.

For the kitchen plumbing—well, it's simple. We have two large water tanks (custom made at the aluminum-making bazaar!) with flat backs and rounded fronts. Each has a lid, for pouring water in and each has a spigot, for taking water out. The spigots are over the new sink and the sink drains into a bucket. When the bucket is full, you open the window and throw it out! Wa-la—kitchen!

Must run. Tomorrow is moving day and we still have to arrange for *charpoy* furniture and our mattress. More details in the next letter. And, to answer your questions: The people are called Afghans and the currency is called Afghanis! Oh, and it turns out, poor Charlie tried to take the plane back, but it broke down and he ended up having to ride all the way back (fourteen hours!) in the back of a lorry. We haven't had time to visit, but I'm sure he has some choice things to say about that trip!

Much love, your youngest daughter

Part 2—The Beginning

September 17, 1971
Dear Mother,

Remember those little metal cars we used to play with? Now picture stuffing a full sized marshmallow inside one of them! That's what we looked like trying to bring our new mattress home in a taxi! Like everything here, mattresses are handmade at the mattress and pillow-making bazaar—where else? The mattress is really just a bed-sized cotton pillowcase stuffed with cotton. When we arrived to pick it up at the bazaar, I couldn't believe it. It was almost as round as it was square! The mattress maker told us that's how they have to be stuffed in order to remain fluffy for very long and that they pack down to a more normal size with time. OK, we thought, if you say so, but now how the heck we were going to get this thing home? About that time, a taxi friend of the merchant came up and said "no problem" he could get the mattress and us all stuffed in his taxi. He ran off and in a few minutes came honking through the little alley with his taxi, no mean feat in itself.

We proceeded to shove and push and finally jam the mattress in, which filled the entire taxi and poked out of all the windows. The driver then managed to wedge himself under it in the front seat and we squished ourselves in the back, barely able to breath and not able to see. The driver was only able to see through the bottom half of the steering wheel, since the mattress was over his head and made him slide down in the seat, but off we went, blindly creeping out of the bazaar and on to main roads back to our house. It felt like forever to get to the house as we were dying of heat and suffocation but eventually, the taxi came to a stop. After much tugging we got the thing

out and the three of us wrestled it to our new wooden bed frame. We normally don't tip the taxis here, but we made an exception for this guy!

In addition to mattress hauling, we've been making furniture (or having it made) and buying dishes. There are imported sets of dishes (in quantities of four) of simple green glass, so bought one set of those and discovered that you can not bargain on imported things. The price is the stated price—period. Got an array of aluminum pots and pans from the aluminum bazaar and went upscale and bought a small pressure cooker from one of the electronic stores downtown. While electricity is somewhat expensive, other volunteers tell us that cooking meat twenty minutes in a pressure cooker beats four hours using kerosene. We will also take delivery tomorrow on our chairs and couch. Let me pause and tell you that when you take "delivery" a truck does not come to your door. First off, you have to draw a map to your house. While there are distinct districts in the city, there are no identifiable street names or addresses. When the furniture is finished it will be loaded and tied on a flat cart then will be pulled by a man (generally a Hazara—see below) who will walk all the way here from the bazaar—barefoot. I think I mentioned before that their feet are so wide and so callused on the bottom, they don't even look like feet. The furniture that he will bring is called *charpoy*, and is pretty fundamental with a plain pine frame made with rounded pieces of wood (about the diameter of a rolling pin) and a coarse, woven rope for the seats and back. It's cheap and durable and also quite uncomfortable and needs cotton cushions to make it bearable (back to the cotton-stuffing bazaar).

Our pièce de rèsistance, however, is the dining table. We learned from others that there were large abandoned wooden spools hither and yon that were used at one time to lay cables and now have just been left out in the fields. Well, if you take one of these giant spools and set it on one end, it makes a wonderful round table, just the right height. Then you buy a rolled

sheet of plastic, cut it in a circle and nail it around the bottom edge for a super-duper round dining table for about $1.50.

We had wanted to take Goolam with us (so had the Hohls) but he was just too expensive at $27.00 a month. Remember our rent is only $23.00. So, he referred us to a young boy, our age actually, who will work for about a half day at $12.00 a month. He will do grocery shopping, cleaning, clothes washing and a little cooking. Goolam says he doesn't know how to cook now, but is willing to learn. His name is Dad Ali and he seems very friendly and eager. He had already learned a few words in English before meeting us, and shook our hands, saying, "Hello, how are yous?" Of course he didn't understand our reply of "Fine, thank you" but just kept smiling and pumping our hands up and down. He is also an Hazara. Although there are many tribes in Afghanistan, there are two predominate ones here in Kabul, the Pushtuns and the Hazaras. The Pushtuns are tall, with narrow faces and long straight noses, dark eyes and hair and relatively light skin. They descended, I was told, from the Aryans and now hold most of the power positions in the country. The Hazaras are a direct contrast. They descended from the Mongols (many who went AWOL from Genghis Khan) and have Chinese characteristics. They are lower on the social scale and practice a different sect of Islam from the Pushtuns. They seem to do most of the manual labor and lower class jobs.

We had a great birthday celebration for Chuck last week. We went out to dinner (AGAIN!) at a popular German restaurant and afterwards had birthday toasts with our precious bottle of wine that had been a gift from Mr. Azam. Being a Moslem country there is supposedly no alcohol, but many people bring it in and it is also available at the U.S. commissary. (We aren't allowed to go there and couldn't afford it anyway so our supply is exceedingly limited– special occasions only.) For his birthday gift I got him a tin of cheese and a carton of crackers from England that I had found tucked away on a dusty shelf in

one the of local markets. It was our first cheese since arriving here and we savored every bite.

We move to our new house tomorrow and classes start on Saturday, so we have a busy and fun week ahead of us.
Love, your youngest daughter

September 25, 1971
Dear Mother,

I dreamed I was sliding down a snowy mountain, trying to get a handhold as I whizzed by branches, but couldn't catch anything. I never hit bottom, I just kept sliding and sliding until I finally woke. But then I was still on the mountain, sleeping on our Moby Dick mattress! Somewhere around two a.m. I was finally was able to scrunch a little indent and stay put. Chuck's size made it easier for him, but the weight on his side ballooned up my side even more! We got a lot of laughs out of it but I'm hoping that in a few days I can sleep without hanging on!

We met many of our students and have started the classes. Since this is a new program, new students have been appearing every day, so this first week has been mostly assessments to find where they are and what they need. Almost all of them need a review of the basics and a lot of practice in speaking and pronunciation. Like the students at the university, they all stood at attention when I entered the room to begin class, and are exceedingly polite. We actually have been working to make them relax a little; they are too reverent and too afraid of making a mistake. I love the sounds of their names: Aziz, Bakee, Ahrary, and female names like Gul-Jhan or Parwee. Most of the women are about my size with olive skin and dark eyes and hair.

The men have the same complexion, and are short by our standards, with the exception of Nik Mohammed, who is as tall as Chuck. The women wear skirts and blouses (no *chadries*) and the men wear long pants, shirts, ties and jackets if they

have them. In the first few days of class, I would often compliment a student on their coat or sweater and discovered the Afghan's wonderful response, which loosely translates as "it seems beautiful to you because you look upon it with beauty in your eyes." I have learned, however, that it's not a good idea to compliment them on small items, because they immediately insist on giving them to you. Yesterday, making small talk after class, I told Parwee that the pin on her blouse was lovely. I barely had the words out of my mouth before she unclasped it and pinned it on me, then absolutely *refused* to take it back. It killed me since it's probably the only piece of jewelry she has.

The Ministry itself is not the spit and polish marble building that comes to my mind when I think of government offices. It's indistinguishable from the other buildings around, except that it's bigger and has a stairway leading up to a double door entrance. Double door in width that is, since there are actually no doors. Sitting here at home I can't even remember what color it is or if it's made of bricks or cement. It just seems old and dusty like every other building. The entry floors are marble (I think) and with a good cleaning and a commercial polish, might look elegant, but they are now dull and continually covered with dust, despite the efforts of a hunched old man who mops from one side to the other all morning long. Our classrooms (there are two) have tables and old wooden chairs with the wide right arm for writing. The rooms have tall windows with heavy drapes that are difficult if impossible to pull since they lack many of the hooks on the top or the pull cord is missing. Happily, there is no real reason to pull them as we use the sunlight. Each room does have two fluorescent tubes for light and a radiator for the months to come. The students warned us that it will get quite cold anyway because the ministry determines the date on which the furnace is lit and for how many hours it gets to be on. It doesn't matter if there's a snowstorm, if it isn't the on-date, there will be no heat. We have simple blackboards, (boards nailed together and painted black) and chalk and one room has a pull-down map of the United States!

We even have a few books that the librarian of the Ministry brought us, plus we can supplement materials from Peace Corps. We have heard stories from other volunteers who have no classrooms or any type of materials. In contrast, we are in pretty good shape!

Back on the home front we have Dad Ali working half days from noon until 6:00, five days a week. He made us his first dinner the other night—hamburger soup! It needed a little help in the salt and pepper department, but not bad for a first try and we lavished praise on him. (He was so pleased with himself!) I bought him an iron but forgot all about an ironing board, until he reminded me this week. He knows where he can have one made cheaply, so we've left him in charge of that project, while Chuck and I continue with the drapes. We borrowed a hand-crank sewing machine from Donna and I bought some colorful cotton to make drapes and plain cotton to make sheets. Now it's just a matter of cutting and hemming. Using the sewing machine is a two-man job; we take turns being the one who guides and pulls the material along or the one who cranks. We have already done the sheets, now just have the drapes. I'm just making a loop at the top and we will slide them on a pole—nothing fancy here. Actually, we'll probably never pull them, since the sunlight lights the room and with the twelve-foot compound walls, no one can see in anyway.

I don't think I mentioned that our house is kitty-corner to the local mosque. This doesn't create the traffic and parking problems you have at home with the Catholic Church since they don't have services or mass, and even if they did, not that many people have cars. What it *does* have is the "call-to-prayer" five times a day. In the last century, this was done by a mullah who merely cupped his hands around his mouth. It has now been simplified and *amplified* by a recording and a loud-speaker! It gave me quite a start the first time I heard it and made me wonder if we had made a big mistake–like the sap who unwittingly moves in next to train tracks! But after a couple of days I decided that it was OK and a couple of days after

that, I decided, (amazingly) that I liked it. It punctuates the day and is a very melodic, a very haunting chant. I wish I had a tape recorder so I could send you a tape, since I lack the words to describe it.

It grows cooler and is quite pleasant outside now. We have to begin thinking about heating for the winter. Like the Afghans we will heat with wood, which is unfortunate given the scarcity of supply. No one here can afford to heat with electricity and I'm not even sure you could buy a furnace even if you wanted one. There is no coal or oil in the country and they can't afford to import any. So, they do what is left– cut down trees, year after year. The students tell us that even these brown hills in Kabul had trees centuries ago and now the forests are just getting smaller and smaller and further away. With no replanting program in effect it's only a matter of time before there will be no forests and no way to heat—putting aside all the other environmental problems it will create. Then what? I could rail about how stupid they are and how short-sided, but it's a little presumptuous coming from a country that uses up oil like there was no tomorrow. So much for feeling superior to third world countries! Anyway, we plan on having a wood-burning stove (called a *bokarie*) in the living room/dining area and a sawdust stove for the hall next to the kitchen. The living room already has a place for the pipe going outside and we'll have one made for the hallway next to the kitchen. The wood stove will work for shorter, hotter fires, making the living room very cozy while the sawdust stove will run longer at a slower heat, warming the hallway and kitchen. The bathroom already has a wood stove for heating the water. Each room seals off with doors, so it's possible to keep one area very toasty, without having to heat the whole house. The bedroom isn't getting anything, so we'll just have to dive under the covers and hang on!

Love, your youngest daughter

P.S. You could send me anything that mixes with water or vinegar—packaged soups, salad dressings, etc. Also, clip-on sunglasses. P.S. II Linda, hope both you and Don had great September birthdays!

October 4, 1971
Dear Mother,

Well, Chuck is now the proud owner of boat-necked t-shirts! I think I told you in the last letter that Dad Ali was in charge of getting an ironing board. And he got it—no problem. (It's rather cute really, with little wooden legs on hinges.) Ironing, I suspect, is a new activity for him and I discovered that he likes to stretch everything flat, iron that, then fold it into neat squares and iron the squares. Chuck's T-shirts apparently presented a challenge, as he couldn't get the neck part as flat as he wanted, so he stretched the necks over the end of the board and ironed them all around. They now measure about thirteen inches across (the width of the ironing board) with the edges sticking straight up. We can't be angry with him, how was he to know? Besides, it was just too hysterical! I probably laughed more than Chuck, who is stuck wearing them, but hopefully the next wash will shrink them some.

And speaking of clothes, I've discovered that the loose baggy pants that all the men wear have enormous waists that are drawn together by a cotton cord. I finally saw some hanging on a line in the bazaar and they are at least four feet across—no exaggeration! No tight jeans for these guys. A further observation of men's dress has revealed that under every turban is a beautifully embroidered skullcap, each pattern and color determined by the area in which it was made. Young boys usually just wear the cap. The men who wear suits or modern dress opt for a wool hat called a *karakul* that is made of lamb's wool and has the shape of a flat khaki army cap. Looks quite distinguished.

We were summoned by the Minister of Finance himself, Dr. Dawar! He decided that since he had English teachers at the Ministry, he too, would take lessons. He doesn't have time to do them during the day, so he sent for us with his car and chauffeur (!) last Tuesday night. We were instructed to call him "Your Excellency" and we arrived at a house that, as Chuck put it, "suits a minister's needs." The living room was formal and stiff with lots of gold around the edges of just about everything and deep maroon Afghan carpets covering the entire floor. For the first half an hour we sipped strong coffee (like mud) served in beautiful crystal cups and made small talk in English with his beautiful German wife, who already speaks English fairly well. Finally, we were able to direct our attentions to him and tried to ascertain what direction we should go with the lessons. It's more of a question of what direction HE wants to go as he seems to be a man who is used to getting his own way. The biggest problem will be *when* to have the classes as he told us he is called away a great deal. In fact, we can't have another lesson for weeks as he will be at some conference in Europe.

Other after-school activities include the University's flag football team, of which Chuck is now a member. This isn't a school-sponsored club but rather a group of volunteers who are trying to spread their enthusiasm for the game to their Afghan friends. There is an eight-week season, with games played at the Embassy field every Friday, and there are teams from the Embassy, the Marines, The American School and various others. This is a big deal for the American community and they go all out for the games with announcers, a scoreboard, cheerleaders, and even a hot-dog stand. I can't see how Chuck's team of Afghans and Peace Corps volunteers is going to do very well against the Marines, but they remain optimistic, even with a 0-2 record. He's an offensive end, by the way, and has already scored three touchdowns! I have been invited to play basketball with a women's group here (at the University gym) and

may go and try it, but I remember being really bad at it in high school and not liking it much either.

I'm thinking of getting a parakeet! I've seen them around here—Afghans like to have birds in their gardens, but haven't seen any for sale. Aref, one of our advanced English students, says he knows someone who-knows-someone who imports them and can get us one or maybe two. Chuck remains dubious about this project, but has agreed to humor me and give it a try.

We got our Christmas box mailed off to you last week. It was quite the hassle, so I'm not sure I'll be sending another. Nor do I have much confidence that it will ever make it out of the Post Office, as a more corrupt and confusing place doesn't exist. Back in training we had been warned on what to expect and took the advice of our teachers to have an Afghan go with us. One of our older students at the Ministry, Mohammed, volunteered to escort us and even he said we couldn't go alone! First off, we probably wouldn't have found the building, being a sort of non-descript drab office building near the center of town. And even with Mohammed, there were endless lines to stand it and instead of being able to actually mail something when you finally got to the front, you merely got a stamp that allowed you to go and stand in another long line. They had to carefully inspect every package, to check, we were told, that we weren't sending any precious antiques out of the country. This involved un-wrapping everything and procuring a stamp for each item. The postal rate didn't seem to be determined by weight or destination but rather by how much it "appeared" you could pay! Having Mohammed with us was a Godsend. With him speaking on our behalf, it only took two hours and cost about $10.00. Some volunteers went alone last week and ended up paying $20.00 and spending SIX hours there. It will truly be a Christmas miracle if you get any of it!

Chuck's calling from the bathroom that the hot water is ready. Time to soap and time to pour. Love those bucket showers! We hope to have a real shower by Christmas!

Love, your youngest daughter

October 13, 1971
Dear Mother,

Well, the parakeets have arrived! Aref brought them into class with a big smile and it took all of my acting ability to keep my mouth from dropping open. Two more horrible looking birds could not be found! Aref was so pleased to be able to give them to us and had no inkling of how awful we thought they were. To him, birds are birds. He refused to take any payment from us so I *do* hope he got them for free. It would be hard to put much of a price on these two. They have NO feathers on their bodies and only a few on their wings. They peck on themselves constantly, making sores and pulling out even more feathers, with huge curved beaks that have never seen the likes of a cuttle-bone. Their claws are frightfully overgrown and I doubt they have ever walked since their cage was about the size of a coffee can. We bought a new cage, four times as big, that has a bottom, but they appear to be afraid of it—won't walk (or can't) at all. They are afraid of us as well and go flapping off hysterically when we approach the cage. Nor do they sing or chirp. They really don't seem like birds at all, more like perching lizards. I had been picturing a cozy little bird like our "Billie Boy." Not quite. Well, we'll see if they start improving. I got some seed and give them lettuce bits and everything I can think of. Two volunteers from our group are veterinarians so I'll ask them for advice next time we see them. (Chuck's advice is to leave them outside with the little door open!)

I baked a pie in our tin-box oven and it turned out pretty well, except was very dry. This wasn't due to the oven, I don't think, but rather the hard, dry little crab apples I used. They didn't look like good pie apples, but were the only ones I could get. (Sigh, I think of all the different bins of apples in the supermarket back home!) But the oven does work, it just takes longer.

As I've gotten to know Dad Ali better, I've learned that he is the father of two. When I asked him what his children's names were, he replied "Ali and Baby." I asked him again

what the baby's name was and got the same answer, "Baby." He then explained that they don't name their babies until the first birthday and then have a big naming celebration. The next day in class I asked my students about the custom and they explained that once a name is given out in a family, it can not be re-used. Since so many babies die in their first year (Peace Corps said 50%) the families don't want to "waste" the name, so they wait to see if the infant will survive the first twelve months. Pretty grim, don't you think?!

This isn't a country of long lives, for anybody. I think the average life span here is about fifty. World Health Organization rates this country as number three in the world for diseases. There are a couple of hellholes in Africa that get top honors. Anyway, people here die left and right from everything —tuberculosis, cholera, small pox, intestinal parasites, childbirth, rabies and just the overall lack of medical care. Simple infections can mean death. It's ironic that back home everyone is protesting the use of chemicals, saying chemicals will cause cancer and send us all to early graves. There's not a chemical in this entire country and look at it—every form of insect and disease and damn few old people!

And speaking of insects, we've been having visitors a little bigger than insects in our kitchen at night. I picked up my oven the other day and there behind it in the corner was this rather large hole in the wall. It made my heart speed up just to look at it and imagine what was coming through there. I showed Dad Ali the next day and he nodded and indicated he knew just what to buy at the bazaar to *fix it good*. I expected him to return with maybe a slightly larger version of those little traps that we buy at the supermarket, but no, he comes back with this monstrosity that looks like a bear trap! It's hand made, of course, and has these huge jagged teeth and a clamp that takes all of Dad Ali's force to pull it back. It scared me to death to watch him set it! If it slipped, I swear, it would take his finger off. But he was very calm about it, thought nothing of it. He put it down in the corner, behind the oven, before he left in the

afternoon. That evening, reading in the living room, we suddenly heard a loud crack–like a plate falling on the cement floor. It took a second for both of us to realize that it was the trap going off. We looked at each other and listened some more. Then we heard kind of a scraping sound, which was obviously the trap being drug around. Horrors! After a few minutes it was quiet. Every room in our house seals off with a door and the door to the kitchen was closed. We quietly got up from our spots in the living room, went out to the hall, then tiptoed to the kitchen door and listened. All was silent. We exchanged a glance then slowly backtracked to the living room, where I proceeded to let out a shriek and wring my hands. Chuck was calmer. "Let's deal with this tomorrow," he said and I nodded in total agreement. Of course that meant that Dad Ali could deal with it tomorrow! We *were* brave enough to open the door in the morning though, and sure enough, over in the corner we could see the tail of the rat from behind the oven. That was a close as I got. Chuck reported however that it was a good six inches long and a tail of another five inches. Dad Ali had arrived by then, so he threw the rat out in the *jewie* in front of the house and reset the Spanish Inquisition's answer to mouse traps. By the time we walked out the door to work, the rat was already gone, breakfast for something or someone.

We discovered that there are also other Americans working at the ministry with a company from the States called the Public Administration Service, which is contracted by USAID–United States Aid for International Development. We met them our first day and they seem very friendly. One of them, Mike Aylward, invited Chuck and I over for dinner this next week. He and his family live only about a mile from us, so we can walk over. Should be an upscale night for us since USAID people live well here—big houses, cars, commissary privileges, the works. Can't wait.

Must go, lesson plans yet to prepare for tomorrow.

Love, your youngest daughter

October 21, 1971
Dear Mother,

First off, the letters have been coming through from everyone at a steady rate and we love them. We go over to the Peace Corps office every Wednesday and peek in our mailbox, hoping for something besides a note from Dr. Rollins that it's time for more shots! So glad everyone's fall is progressing well. Nice to know Mom, you have under thirty kids in your classroom this year!

How would you like to play polo with a headless goat! That's a pretty close description of the *Buz Kashi* (pronounced bush-ka-shee) games, where we went last week with our student, Nik Mohammed. These games were special, called the King's games, honoring his birthday I think, and are held in a large stadium just outside of the city. Nik Mohammed wanted to take us so he could explain the games and protect us. He told us rather matter-of-factly that spectators are often killed–not from over zealous fans but from the players on horseback! Now having been there, I can see how this happens.

The game works like this: two teams of horse-riders fight to carry a goat's carcass to a special center ring. (*Buz Kashi* literally means goat-drag) The goat, quite dead already, has been decapitated, disemboweled and filled with sand. The game starts with said goat in a hole in the middle of the field. A team has to pick it up, carry it to the end of the field around a type of goal post and then get it back to the original hole. There looked to be about ten riders on each team, but Nik said they can make the teams larger if they wish as traditionally it was one tribe against another. Each rider carries a small whip in his teeth and he can whip anyone, man or horse, that gets in his way. I noticed that they all wear protection on their hands. If someone falls off –easy to do when reaching down at a full gallop to pick up this "thing" then he can just get trampled and no one much cares.

We saw several riders fall off and team members or friends dragged them off the field—God (or Allah) knows what kind

of medical attention they get, but Nik told us they become instant heroes. The problem for the spectators is that a large percentage of the crowd doesn't sit in the stadium but just stands along the end of the field. If the horses come thundering down that direction (and there are no exact boundaries) then the crowd just has to flee. Usually, someone isn't nimble enough and they get plowed under. Too bad for them, the game goes on. We, fortunately, were seated in the stadium, with a better view and out of harm's way. Even up higher, the game is a little hard to follow since most of the time there is just this huge jumble of horses and men kicking up dust, then suddenly someone will charge away dragging the goat and seconds later it's a big jumble again, and on it goes. I'm not sure I understood the finer points of the game, or even if there *were* any finer points, but it was an interesting afternoon to say the least.

We've had fun as late, visiting other volunteers and seeing how they have set up their houses. We went over to the Hohls a few nights ago and enjoyed dinner with them. They live on the opposite side of town from us and are teaching English in a boy's school. Their house is more typically Afghan with all the rooms connecting in a square around a patio in the middle. More of a style we would think of as Spanish but perhaps the origins of both people are the same? Anyway, it was a fun evening and we can now laugh about some of our frustrations during training.

Dad Ali helped us get our wood and sawdust supply for the winter last week. You have to buy it all at the same time to get a good price and we can store it in the old dilapidated shed out back. The purchase presented several problems. First off, just how much wood do we need? Never having heated with wood and sawdust, or knowing how cold it gets, it's pretty hard to estimate. Secondly, wood is sold by the *harwah* and since we don't know how much an *harwah* actually is, it's hard to order. Thirdly, we were warned that the wood sellers are tricky devils and even though it looks like they are measuring fairly using a weight-balanced scale, they have easy ways of cheating you,

especially if they think you are a gullible foreigner. Dad Ali figured out what we needed in both wood and sawdust and did all the negotiations for us. The wood sellers came to the house hauling a huge cart of wood, pulled by two oxen. The wood was already cut in two and three feet sections and was unloaded it and measured it in our yard. We stayed (hid) inside and watched Dad Ali haggle with them. "I get good price," he told us afterwards and we believed him. And there's nothing I could do about it, even if he didn't.

Our other winterizing project has been covering the windows with heavy plastic. This is a common practice and basically takes the place of storm windows. Chuck measured all the windows (save the kitchen window where we throw out the water) and went down to the bazaar and bought a long roll of very thick clear plastic. Then Dad Ali nailed it around the outside of the window frames, doubling the edges with strips of cardboard to keep the nails from tearing through it. I've noticed this house was positioned just right to take advantage of the sun. As winter approaches the sun has lowered and is now shining directly in through the living room windows. With the plastic insulation this room should be warm when the sun is out, even in mid-winter. We've waited until now to put it up because we were afraid it would get too hot.

Ramadan will start in a few days. This is the month long fast (well, they can eat after the sun goes down) and we're told it makes everything difficult. Let you know first-hand in the next letter.

Give my love to all and yes, I'll write Grandmother!
Love, your youngest daughter

October 30, 1971
Dear Mother,

Ramadan has been underway for about a week. This is the holy month in which nothing is to pass through the lips (water,

food, cigarette smoke, etc.) during the daylight hours. Pregnant women, elderly people, infirm people and foreigners are exempt. One of our students explained that the custom started to teach people about suffering and how it was to be poor—hardly a lesson needed here! There are also various superstitions such as if a Muslim looks at a cross during Ramadan their soul will be cursed and then only special prayers from special Mullahs will save them in Allah's eyes. Every night at the second of the sun's setting, a huge cannon roars off and people can then begin to eat. The same cannon goes off before dawn to stop the process.

What we have been finding is that everyone is staying up most of the night and gorging themselves. Then they are irritable and half-asleep all the next day! I don't see how eating all night and sleeping all day makes you any purer or better, but I don't plan to start any discussions about it! In fact, speaking of religion, many of our students wanted to know if we were Christians. I told them I was raised as a Christian, but was now studying all the religions, with the implied idea that I will choose the "best" one at the end of my spiritual journey. Not only is this true but this answer makes everyone happy. They naturally assume that since I'm an intelligent person, I will choose the way of Allah. They are happy to answer questions about Islam, but they don't do any proselytizing.

A few days before Ramadan started we went to our first, and hopefully last Afghan wedding! Our landlord's daughter was getting married and we had been delighted to accept the invitation since we were anxious to learn about another native custom. The wedding was held in a large hall and we arrived at the time we were told, 7:00 p.m. There were a few tables set out and a few chairs and some chairs lining the walls. People came in and were just milling about, some chatting in small groups. We knew no one and our landlord was nowhere in sight. We attempted small talk with a few strangers, but our efforts petered out after a while, so we just sat down and waited…and waited… and waited. More people arrived as the evening wore

on until there were hundreds of us. Finally, after FOUR hours of just sitting there, at 11:00 o'clock, a man came out and announced that dinner would be served in the adjoining room. So we all crowded through the door to the next room and found an enormous buffet spread out over FOURTEEN (I counted them) long tables. The total guest list was over five hundred people (!) and this amazing quantity of food would have served all of them and then some. The tables were loaded with mountains of rice *pilau* filled with nuts and carrots, trays of vegetables, all kinds of sliced fruits, special meats and in the center were FOUR entire lambs that had been roasted. Everybody rushed in, grabbed a plate, heaped a ton of food on it, and then the most amazing thing—they didn't go back in and sit down with the food! Everyone just remained standing right there at the buffet, shoveling down food at a prodigious rate, taking seconds, and eating that just as fast as they had eaten the first plate. Then they put their plates at the end of the table and returned to the other room to wait some more! The whole "eating" part took less than ten minutes! Now it's 11:15 and we followed the crowd back to room number one and continued with the longest night I can ever remember. We waited another TWO hours and finally the bride came out with the groom. I couldn't see everything over the tops of all the heads, but could see them hold a cloth over their heads as they recited special prayers. Then a mirror was held in front of them and (according to the gentleman next to us) this was so they could look at each other's reflection for the first time. That was followed by the custom of sharing blood. One of the attendants pricked a finger of each of them, then they held their fingers together, mingling their blood. (Didn't some native Americans do this too?) Glad it wasn't me; I would have passed out right there.

Finally, they closed the ceremony with certain readings and prayers we couldn't hear, then everyone up close threw little candies at them and sang a couple of songs. A special wedding cake and special "good luck" bread was brought in, and like our weddings, they had the first bite. The ceremony was now

over, but the nice gentleman next to us explained once again that many would stay and visit and eat some more until the early dawn. We managed to wriggle through the crowd, find our landlord, give him our congratulations then escaped at two o'clock. We promised each other in the taxi home that if either of us ever receive another wedding invitation, we make up something instantly and get out of it, even if it means leaving town!

In contrast, we went over to the Aylwards (the USAID people) last night and had a wonderful time. They are about fifteen years older than we are, but are so much fun the age difference isn't important. Mike is short, has flaming red hair and a trimmed red bread to match. He's got a wonderful smile and possesses boundless enthusiasm. I think his favorite word is "great!" Darlene, his wife, is about my size and was so easy to talk to, that after a couple of hours I felt we had been friends for years. They both met and married later in life, while working overseas in Thailand, and two years ago adopted a darling baby girl who was part Hawaiian and part Asian.

This two-year old little charmer, named Lisa, carefully brought us a tray of hors d'oeuvres and carefully took the tray back when we were done. That plus a fluffy little dog named Namdu completes their family. They were so friendly and fun to be with and it didn't seem to make any difference to them that we were lowly Peace Corps volunteers. Their house is huge and gorgeous with almost all of the comforts of the USA. We sat in their spacious living room and had drinks with ice! Followed by a great meal, then REAL ice cream. It was heaven. And since there are no buses and few taxis in their neighborhood at night, they drove us back home! I've invited them to our humble abode this coming week and will try to cook something really good for them though it may be a challenge in my kitchen.

We splurged and bought a three-band radio! We can now hear The B.B.C. (British Broadcasting Station) an Australian station and sometimes the Voice of America. As the nights

have been getting colder, Chuck lights a fire in our little living room stove and we sit cuddled up with cushions and listen to the funny shows and music we can get from the BBC station. Reminds me of when I was little and we used to all sit around and listen to Jack Benny. Remember? There's a great BBC show called "My Word" which is a fast paced and very witty game show. It comes in at 8:00 so we've been trying to get our buckets showers done before then and then settle back all bundled up in our robes.
Time to turn in.
Love, your youngest daughter

November 10, 1971
Dear Mother,

Chuck came down with strep throat this past week and was confined to bed for a couple of days. It makes us really appreciate Dr. Rollins and our Peace Corps medical staff. We are *so* fortunate not to have to rely on Afghan medical facilities. A few volunteers have seen the inside of the national hospital and they say it is dreadful with people sitting on the floors in deplorable situations, waiting for some kind of help. Anyway, the strep cleared up, but then for some reason his kidneys had a temporary shut down and he didn't pee for about a day. Dr. Rollins gave him some pills that he claimed would "wring water out of a doorknob" and after some more time they did. Good thing, as this is not the place you want to have a kidney failure. For your information, if something like that did happen, we would be flown to the hospital in Beirut, which they say is modern and as good as any in the U.S. Anyway, Dr. Rollins took all kinds of tests and all seems to be OK now. I figure it had to do with the strep, fever and infection.

We went down to the used clothes bazaar and got some warmer sweaters and I bought a nice wool coat. It's actually a man's, but around here, who cares? Two sweaters, one coat and a sweater for Dad Ali (his Ramadan present) all came to

$4.00. I noticed in the bazaar that they were selling sacks of wheat stamped "Donated by the United States" and other boxes of stuff marked "Sample—Not for Sale." Some distribution method, hey? It probably wasn't what the donors had in mind! It seems that most of the higher officials are corrupt and everybody is just out to "get theirs" and to hell with the next guy. Chuck and I were thinking that just spending our salaries in our neighborhood shops is probably the best foreign-aid going. It puts money into the ground-level economy and helps those who are trying to run and maintain small businesses.

I invited Mike and Darlene over to our house last weekend and managed a tasty meal (if I say so myself) from my primitive kitchen. My main course was lamb (mutton, excuse me) simmered for hours in a tomato sauce and served over rice. Rice, by the way, always has to be soaked for a couple of hours before you can cook it, otherwise it takes forever to cook. For my salad I was able to layer some peeled cucumber slices with peeled and iodized tomatoes and sprinkle it all with oil and vinegar. (You can buy lettuce here but it will guarantee diarrhea since it doesn't come "clean" even with iodine.) For dessert–sugar cookies from the infamous tin box oven! They came through the door laden with hostess gifts: four cans of Campbell's Cream of Mushroom soup, one large jar of Skippy's peanut butter, and a large bottle of bourbon. How can I ever pay that back?!

When Dad Ali came in the next day he was especially curious about the peanut butter. He knew what the bourbon was and the cans of soup, but peanut butter was something new. I explained how it was made from peanuts and was a favorite sandwich ingredient for U.S. children. Of course he had to sample some (despite Ramadan) and I put a small amount in a teaspoon. At first his eyes just widened, then a look of horror came over his face and he ran outside and spat it out! He thought I was pulling his leg about its popularity. I told him he needs to put in on a cracker or bread to get the real essence of it, but now he won't come near the jar!

I don't have Dad Ali doing any of the cooking now, not because he wasn't any good, but rather it just doesn't fit into the schedule. We find the house is too small to have him underfoot when we are here, plus I don't like someone working around me. So now he comes in after we leave in the mornings, cleans up the dishes from the night before, cleans the house and buys the groceries for the day. I leave a list –he can read all of the English words and if not, now I can write most of them in Farsi. We usually only see him on laundry days when he stays until we come home. Our breakfast is simple with bread and jam and fruit and we generally eat lunch out at a cheap café near the Ministry. I make dinner after we get home. And speaking of food, please send along any recipes that only ask for basic ingredients. Notwithstanding the generosity of the Aylwards, it's very difficult to obtain processed or canned goods. I need soup or sauce recipes that can be made from scratch, using basics like vinegar, flour, sugar, etc. Anything Grandmother could have made when she was first married and lived in the Oklahoma territory. All would be welcome. I did buy a small pressure cooker to speed the meat cooking process along since during the week I'm not there all day to simmer it and get it in a chewable state. Plus, it makes doubly sure that everything is well done. With all the diseases here it is NOT the place for rare meat.

We're starting to make some vacation plans to visit Northern India and the fabled Kashmir area in January, but it will depend on the situation between Pakistan and India. They are rattling their sabers once again and we hear from the embassy gossip that war is imminent. So, we'll see. I guess we could always go the other direction, to Iran, but we were looking forward to getting out of the Islamic culture for awhile.

We had six other volunteers over last week (before the strep-throat) for spaghetti and a rousing game of charades. It was great fun and the spaghetti turned out well, especially considering that the hamburger doesn't taste like hamburger and I

don't have mushrooms, rosemary, canned tomato sauce or Parmesan cheese. No one seemed to notice.

I'm getting a little stiff and chilly here as the afternoon sun fades away. I'm sitting in the living room in my favorite spot, which is on a big green cushion, leaning against another big green cushion propped against the wall. I write this with my knees pulled up and a heavy notebook across my thighs as a desk. Overhead hangs one of the two lights here in the living room, although I haven't turned it on yet. Directly across from me are the living room windows looking out to the yard with its now brown grass and the tall compound wall beyond that. It's hard to believe that I'm sitting here in the middle of Asia, on the other side of the earth from you. I believe I am slowly adapting to this life that is without so many of the things I took for granted—clean water for starters. Speaking of which, I think I'll get up and start dinner, which begins with the rinsing and soaking of all the vegetables in iodine water for half an hour. It's not a bad job in itself, but now the water is icy cold and hurts your hands.
Love, your youngest daughter

November 22, 1971
Dear Mother,

Great day of days—it's the end of Ramadan today! Cannons were booming all over the city and everyone is joyous, the observers and non-observers alike. Several of our students didn't observe the month fast, believing it to be harmful to your health, and I couldn't agree more. I guess one can go all day without food, but I'm sure it's damaging to go without water. At least now it's cold. Since this is a lunar holiday it continually rotates around the year. When it arrives in the summer, we're told people routinely pass out from lack of water.

One afternoon, our students Aref and Osman, non-observers of this tradition, came by our house to have lunch. They both think Ramadan is ridiculous and they spent the entire month

sneaking around, trying to eat during the day. Since we're foreign infidels and exempt from the custom, our house makes a perfect get-away. Aref (the one who brought me the parakeets) has excellent English and is even able to joke in English. He has straight black hair, a hawk nose and is short with a stocky build. Osman is taller and thinner and although his English is good, he usually lets Aref do most of the speaking. It has become easier to get to know the men students since they have more freedom than the women (of course!) and possibly fewer demands around their houses, since they are not preparing the meals, cleaning the house or doing the laundry. And I'm not sure the women would be comfortable coming over here with two single male students anyway. They wear modern dress, but they do not have modern, or shall we say *Western,* concepts of socializing or dating. Aref and Osman had come over specifically because they wanted to make us *real* kabob, as they termed it. We often eat at the kabob stands but they claimed we had to have the home cooked variety. It reminds me of men and their barbecues back home. I made my cucumber-tomato salad and home-made potato chips and they brought the mutton and the *non.* Using a hubcap and some wire grating, they rigged a simple barbecue in the yard, roasted the meat to perfection and we gobbled it down rolled inside the hot *non*. We got into a long discussion of the problems of the country and why more couldn't be done to improve things. Aref had such a great answer, I'll try to reproduce it for you. "Our world is very small," he told us. "We are all like frogs that live in the bottom of a well. We have never seen the sunlight or the trees or any of the things that are outside the well. We don't know they exist. So we have no reason to hop out of the well. We are happy with just the smallest thing—like to see a little piece of sky or a little rain. So, we just spend our lives hopping around on the bottom of the dark, wet, well and never try to jump out." So, in other words, they think corruption and miserable living conditions are standard fare, so there is no motivation to change things.

It's a good thing that they both live here in the capitol and can get away with rebellious behavior. This fast-breaking couldn't be done in the rural areas (even behind compound walls!) where the Mullahs have complete control over religion and law. They told us a story about a young man in one of the provinces who decided to defy the custom and openly not observe the fast. They made a fine example of him by poking his eyes out and cutting off his arms and legs! I know that sounds too far fetched to be believed, but believe it! For the Mullahs, the standard is punishment, not forgiveness.

Well, football season is over and Chuck's team finished with a perfect score—zero wins, eight losses! It's not fair since the Peace Corps team is half Afghan and the Afghans keep wanting to play it like they play soccer. Oh well, Chuck played very well, caught lots of touchdown passes and did have a lot of fun. Meanwhile, I've still been trotting off to the University gym on Monday nights to play women's basketball, but the organization has fallen apart. The one girl that was the captain, sprained her ankle the first night I was there and it's been down hill ever since. Just as well, since I don't like the game and running a few laps around the gym suits me fine. Last week though, we didn't even manage to do that so I think the whole project is now kaput.

The other day, I complimented one of my women students, Gul Jan, on her shiny hair (thought that was safe since she couldn't very well cut it off and give it to me!) and she insisted on bringing me the special *henna* rocks she uses for shampoo. She told me you first have to soak the rocks until they melt down into a mud-like substance, then rub that mixture in your hair and rinse. It sounded simple enough so I went home and started soaking the rocks. After about four hours and a little help from some boiled water, I had my mud. When we were ready for our bucket showers, I had Chuck pour some water over my head and I cautiously started smearing the brown red goo in my hair. Chuck kept asking me "are you sure this is what they use?" I was having my doubts but continued to slop

it on until gooey, reddish rivers were streaming down my face. I rubbed it around, massaged it in with my fingertips, but it didn't lather at all, so I had Chuck start pouring the water over my head little bit at a time trying to rinse it out. I used up most of Chuck's share of the hot water trying to get the muck out and I still didn't get it all out. My hair looked and felt like straw. The next day was Friday, the day off, so I had a chance to wash my hair again with my remaining German shampoo before I saw Gul Jan on Saturday. "It was just great," I lied, when I saw her. I offered my remaining rocks to Chuck, but he took a pass.

And while I'm on the topic of hair, Mother, remember the hair cutting scissors you gave us? We keep them in constant use. Yesterday was hair cutting day—I cut Chuck's then he cut mine. He's getting quite good at it and I'm so glad he can do it. I don't know where I'd go to have it cut short. It would be against the law to go to a man's barber and I doubt the women's would have any idea of how to cut it so short.

We'll be spending Thanksgiving at the Aylwards and will be taking Ed and Gary, two single volunteers, with us. I'm going to make our family's famous dilly-bread and take that as our contribution. Should be an "engorging" afternoon. Hope you all have good T-days wherever you are.
Love, your youngest daughter.
P.S. We hear from the embassy that there is a dock-strike going on in the States. We were told that our packages to you will probably be held on the docks until the strike is over and likewise packages from you, unless they got out before the strike. So, despite my efforts, it doesn't look good for Christmas present arrival in either direction.

December 5, 1971
Dear Mother,

Well, it was a week of contrasting dinners. First, was the Thanksgiving dinner at the Aylwards that just couldn't be beat!

Darlene had a real turkey and dressing and such unheard of treats as celery, pickles and cranberries. My dilly bread turned out very well and we finished it off with pumpkin pie and whipped cream. Since there is no television and hence no football games, Chuck played the guitar and we played cards—a lot more fun in my opinion! It truly felt so much like we were in the States that it was almost a shock walking back outside. I must mention that every time we step outside of a compound wall, we instinctively stoop down and put rocks in our pockets. There are roving packs of wild dogs all throughout the city and they do have rabies here, so Peace Corps taught us to always have a rock ready to throw at a dog, as it will usually deter them. So far, we haven't had any threatening situations, but when I see stray dogs, I like to reach down and feel the security of a rock in my pocket. It has become such a habit; I wonder how long I'll keep doing it after I come home?

The second dinner and maybe the one I'll remember longer, was dinner at Dad Ali's. He had been pestering us for almost two months now to come and have lunch and we kept coming up with excuses since we just didn't want him to spend the money on us. But with Thanksgiving, he got the idea that this was *the* week to have good meals so insisted we come. He drew us a careful map and on Friday, we caught a taxi on the main road and headed to a small cluster of houses about six miles east of us. From the outside, his place looked like all others, with a tall mud compound wall around it. But inside, it was pretty bleak. Basically, there were just two rooms with dirt floors, dirt walls and two small windows, (no curtains) and the whole place swarming with flies. The "front" room was about ten feet by ten feet and it is where everybody eats, sleeps and sits. This is the land of the extended family and while Dad Ali only has two children, certain brothers, parents, cousins and I don't know who-all, live there too. There is no running water or electricity; they cook outside and have an outdoor latrine. We sat down on cushions on the floor, and they brought in a plastic tablecloth and spread it down before us. Then his wife

came out with a heaping platter of rice *pilau* with meat and sauce. We ate Afghan style, with our hands. Dad Ali doesn't even own silverware and was going to bring some of ours, but we told him no, we would do just fine without it. So, while it was a little messy with the sauce, we scooped away with our *non*, making small talk and acting like this was how we always ate. But get this! They only had enough food to serve *us*, so Dad Ali's brothers and father all sat back and WATCHED us eat, while Dad Ali waved a dirty cloth back and forth over our plates trying to keep the flies off. The worst was the fact that they probably hadn't had a meal this good in months. The children had been shooed outside and they hid at the edges of the doorway, peeking in at us with big solemn eyes all throughout the meal. We both ate as little as we could without appearing rude. After the meal, Dad Ali's wife came in and shyly presented us with two napkins she had embroidered. We were both falling all over ourselves with thanks for the meal and the napkins, which are way too nice, by the way, to use as napkins. We went home feeling, feeling…I don't know. Feeling sad and ashamed I guess at how much we have. If you calculate the cost of a dinner against net income, it may have been the most expensive dinner we'll ever be served. I wished I could buy him a new house, but I can't. I did what I could do, which was to promptly make a banana bread and gave it as a thank you.

India and Pakistan are now officially at war. This means (in addition to useless bloodshed) that the dock in Karachi, Pakistan is closed. So, if your Christmas packages did make it through the dock strike in the USA, they will now sit in Karachi until the end of the war. You may think it's trivial of me to be thinking about Christmas presents in light of a WAR, but truly, I believe the Christmas presents will have more lasting value. This isn't the first skirmish over Kashmir and I would bet my Peace Corps salary that it won't be the last. They'll just waste lives and money until one side backs down (probably Pakistan) and then it will simmer away for a decade or so until they start over. From my self-centered point of view, it also

puts the kibosh on our vacation plans for January. Our neighbors, the Kistler's, who finish their tour in January and who had been planning their travel home in an Easterly direction, are most disappointed.

We can still get things though that come in the size of manila envelops, so Mom, I need a favor. I REALLY need some new panty-hose and the only ones I can find here are some kind of factory rejects. They are woven with one foot going straight, like normal, but the other foot goes sideways! You can't get the one leg to pull up past your calf since it is twisted so badly. At first I thought it was me, but after taking them off and on three times I realized that the damn things just won't go on. So, anyway, if you could buy me a pair or two from Penney's (size-average, color-suntan) I would be most appreciative.

I missed you so much at Thanksgiving. It did seem weird to be here (weirder than normal) instead of sitting at the round table at 2715. And I missed your turkey dressing!!

Love, your youngest daughter

December 11, 1971

Dear Mother,

It has been a week of good-byes and an odd sensation to see people leaving while we are still here. Dr. Rollins and the Kistlers next door are both finishing their tours this month. There was a big party for Dr. Rollins last week, volunteers came in from all over and it was quite the affair. There was a big party at Peace Corps with all kinds of goodies to eat and some tapes of good ole rock n' roll so we all danced until the wee hours. Dr. Rollins has been loved and now we anxiously await his replacement and hope that we can luck out with another great doctor.

Having the Kistlers next door leave, makes my heart just ache. Donna and Jim have been such a help and it will feel so empty not to have them here. Up until now we've been too

busy to even think about our departure and it's too far away to think about anyway, but now it seems like we will be here a very long time. My first little wave of homesickness, I guess. You had asked if we were happy and pleased that we were here and the answer is yes, but seeing Donna go still fills my eyes with tears.

Donna and Jim had a horse, which I think I mentioned, that they have sold to someone and they are happy with it's new home, but their dog is another matter. He's a German shepherd, and they have grown to love him like a child. Often, as dogs are passed on to other American families, that family or the next family drops the ball and the dogs are turned loose. Then they just become these malnourished, ragged street dogs. Donna couldn't bear the idea of that fate for their "Momken" so she and Jim decided to have him put to sleep. I didn't agree with them, but then, he's not my dog and I didn't have any say in the matter. They arranged for a veterinarian to come to the house to do the "deed" and on the dreaded day, Donna took off while Jim, Chuck and I waited around for him. He came to the gate door and after the customary greetings and seeing where Momken was resting in the yard, he suddenly pulls a gun out from under his jacket and Bam! He shoots Momken directly in the head! We all stood there, too stunned for words, since we had been expecting, or I had at any rate, some kind of gentle injection. I guess it was foolish of me to think they had that kind of "stuff" here in this country and I suppose the bullet was just as fast and effective, but it seemed so violent. Good thing Donna wasn't watching.

It appears we've been very lucky to have gotten our assignment in the ministry. All the volunteers working at the university are very frustrated and several are talking of leaving. The biggest problem is that the university is always on strike over something and there is just no work. The latest strike is from the students who are rebelling against the fact that the passing grade has been raised to fifty-five from fifty! And that's fifty-five out of a hundred! Volunteers have politely mentioned that

in the rest of the world *seventy* is considered passing, but it doesn't get them very far. We are so happy to be in the ministry. Our students try to make it to class every day and are enthusiastic and anxious to learn. We have plenty to do and that is good.

Even with the work, there is free time and we are spending many of these long nights reading and studying. (We still have a tutor, by the way.) Peace Corps has a wonderful paperback library that has been the compilation of left-behind paperbacks from volunteers these past eight years. There's everything from *War and Peace* to romance novels. The check out policy is liberal—just bring them back some day. I've been reading Willa Cather lately and love her. I also decided to learn how to play bridge and am slowly plowing through Alfred Sheinwold's bridge book. Dad Ali, who has a wonderful curiosity about everything, picked up the book the other day, saw the little card pictures and asked me what it was about. I explained that it was directions for a game of cards. He then wanted to know how many card games were in the book and I repeated myself, to say that it was all for just ONE game. He burst out laughing to think that anyone would care to learn a game that had that many instructions. He may be right!

We've decided to go all out for first married Christmas! We're planning a big party here for other volunteers on the 23rd and are going to decorate the house with a tree! Dad Ali loves the idea of decorating and the more colors he can use, the better. I bought some green and red construction paper and have given him the project of copying and cutting out "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year." Then we'll tape them on a string and hang them on the living room wall. Our other big task is our Christmas tree decoration. Aref is going to bring us a little tree and I've decided that we can decorate it with popcorn chains, blown-out eggs rolled in glitter, and aluminum foil chains. The hardest one of these, is the blowing out of the eggs! After blowing about two, it kills your cheeks! (Have you tried it lately?!) So, we've decided to eat scrambled eggs every

day, and Dad Ali, Chuck and I all take turns blowing out two or three eggs a day. We've got a nice little stack going in a basket and Dad Ali is all excited about the next phase with the glue and glitter. I've been doing the aluminum-foil chains as a break from reading in the evenings but may discard the popcorn idea. I worked on a popcorn chain last night and after two hours only had a pitiful looking chain of seventeen inches. The popcorn kept breaking apart! Besides, I'm afraid it might attract more rodents.

On a somber note, one of our students died of rabies last week. We didn't know him well as he had only made it to class twice, but it was horrible to think of him dying so young and in such an awful way. Nor was it good news that he was bitten here in Kabul. Makes me so thankful that we have our shots and I find myself putting even more rocks in my pocket when I step outside. The other students were sad but more or less just shrugged it off as "one of those things." Life here is so easy to lose.

It would be so nice if my Christmas box arrived, but I know you'll have a wonderful Christmas even without my meager contribution. We will be thinking of home and sending our Christmas love.
Love, your youngest daughter

December 26, 1971
Dear Mother,

What a wonderful Christmas we've had! I meant to write last week, but we took an extra day off for the holiday and never got back over to the Peace Corps office for the weekly mailings. On our last day of class Chuck brought in his guitar and we sang Christmas carols for our students, much to their delight. A few of them had actually heard "Jingle Bells" before. They have been very interested in learning about Christmas customs and are all pleased that we will have a little Christmas tree and will celebrate our Christmas in their land.

Thanks to Aref for our tree and Dad Ali for all of his help, our house looked the very picture of Christmas! It even snowed here on the 20ieth, so all was white. The tree was gay and bright with the sparkling eggs– fifty two of them!!!! (Dad Ali LOVED doing the glitter part of the operation) and tin-foil chains. I bought a trio of leather camels down in the bazaar, which became my three wise men camels, in solemn procession across the windowsill and also got two large woolen Afghan socks and embroidered our names across the top. We tacked them above the small doorway leading to the dining room. And we were bestowed with an extra decoration when the Aylwards presented us with their Christmas "find" from the bazaar—an old Johnny Walker liquor bottle (!) with a miniature tree inside that had been built with wooden sticks and colorful cotton tassels–a simple version of the ship-in-a-bottle. It wasn't supposed to be a Christmas tree, of course, but it passes for one, and looked quite smart on our little coffee table.

We had a stupendous Christmas party on the 23rd with sixteen of our fellow volunteers. Everyone brought cookies and treats and we had made four *gallons* of eggnog. (A little too much we discovered.) The hardest part was trying to whip the egg whites for a froth on top without an egg beater. Elana was helping me and we about broke our wrists trying to get the stuff to "make peaks!" The highlight of the evening was our Afghan adaptation to Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. The ghost of Christmas past was of course dressed in a *chaudrie* and the ghost of Christmas future in a mini-skirt! We all laughed until we toppled off the cushions, our sides aching! And I suppose it didn't hurt that we had some "gifted" rum in the eggnog! As people left we presented them with little Christmas presents—hand copies of recipes I had found that actually work here, tied up in ribbon. One volunteer thanked us with tears in his eyes and told us we had given him the best present of all—a touch of home.

First thing on Christmas morning (after lighting the fires and making tea) we emptied out our stockings and found Santa had

filled them with such delights as cans of cheese, new toothbrushes, new socks and little candies. Under the tree Chuck had a new watch for me and a beautiful topaz necklace. (Chuck cheated and went over our budget!) For him, I had an embroidered Afghan shirt, a new English book and a great camel poster for the wall. Oh, and we each got each other a tennis racket. We are allowed to play on the courts for USAID, so thought it might be fun to give it a go. It was the most delightful of Christmases and we finished off the day having dinner with Mary Jane and Karol Stewart. Karol is another member of the American P.A.S. team at the ministry, and like all the Americans here, they have gone out of their way to befriend Peace Corps volunteers. They shared a fabulous Christmas dinner with us and we even played a little bridge afterwards.

More great tidings! The war between Pakistan and India is over! I'm not sure who won, who backed off, who lost face or who got what, but the borders are open and commerce is flowing! That means that some day we may get your Christmas box AND we can make a trip over the border. There is a holiday here the end of January, which is our first anniversary, so we are planning a four day trip out of the country over to the town of Peshawer, Pakistan, just on the other side of the border. The Aylwards are going to take us in their VW bug (do you think Chuck can fit in the back?) and we are told there is wonderful food and shopping bazaars full of brass and woodwork—neither which are available here. But mostly, it will be fun to leave the country for a few days.

Our New Year's Eve plans are pretty simple. Remember that this isn't New Year's Eve here. Theirs is celebrated in the spring, which, when I think of it, makes more sense. Spring *is* the re-birth of the year with the new plants and baby sheep. Anyway, what with snowy roads, and early dark nights, we thought we would just snuggle up next to our stove and open our little Christmas cans of cheese.

Am anxious to hear about everybody's Christmas and wish everyone the happiest and most prosperous New Year. And give a little thanks to the fact that you were all born in the United States and not here.
Love, your youngest daughter

P.S. Rita, when this letter reaches you, remember to have a Happy Birthday! I'll be thinking of you on your day!

January 2, 1972
Dear Mother,

Christmas just keeps coming! When we went to the Peace Corps office today, there were two manila envelopes, one from you with the nylons –THANK YOU, THANK YOU!! And the other from Rita with a letter and pictures and a pot and pan scrubbie thing I had asked for. Unfortunately, both packages had been opened and the shampoo and lotion Rita had included were gone. She had written a list of what was enclosed, so I could see what was missing. I guess nobody wanted my nylons, so your package was complete. It is *so* irritating to have things stolen. I know people in the States are forever complaining about our postal system, how it's too expensive, etc. etc. At least they get their parcels in one piece with everything in them. "Shut 'yer complaining," I say.

Other bureaucratic nightmares here involve obtaining visas, as we've learned, in preparation for our trip to Peshawer. We have to go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, obtain stamps and signatures (and pay *baksheesh*, as it's called here) then take those papers to the Ministry of the Interior, repeat the process, then proceed to the police station for the final Afghan seal of approval, *then* take the whole pile over to the Pakistan Embassy! Chuck has so far made it through phase one, the Foreign Affair Ministry. That stop alone took three hours yesterday!

We got into our first quarrel with Dad Ali. We came home to find that he hadn't cleaned the bathroom or shoveled the roof or done the laundry. All projects that need doing—especially the roof, since it's about ready to cave in. Chuck just blew up and said "You're fired!" Dad Ali simply nodded, then got on his bicycle and peddled away. Chuck then went next door and hired the Kistler's old servant, Abdullah, who is working for a new single volunteer that has moved in over there. That night we sat around and started recalling all the wonderful things Dad Ali had done for us and were feeling worse and worse about it until we were both in tears. Next morning, who's at our gate bright and early, none but Dad Ali who came by to ask if he was still "fired" and of course we re-hired him on the spot. Chuck then had to go over to Mike Osmera's (the new volunteer there) and tell Abdullah that we wouldn't be needing his services. He asked me to remind him to never take a job in personnel!

We had about decided we didn't need to make a shower in the bathroom when the wood burning stove in the bathroom rusted through. Since we then had to get a new wood stove, we decided to have them rig up a pipe and make a real shower. Dad Ali found a plumber for us (or someone who said they knew how to do it) and in one day we returned home from work to a functioning shower. For some reason, forgetting where I was, I was envisioning a stateside shower. So, it was a bit of a shock to see a jagged hole in the wall, an ugly pipe sticking out and a very homemade showerhead at the end. If a modern, chrome showerhead was a "ten" and a tin can with nail holes was a "one," I would give this contraption a "two!" But I shouldn't complain, it does work and it truly is a delight to have hot water raining over your head and shoulders. There is no shower stall, so the water falls all over the toilet, but it all eventually makes its way to the drain in the floor. You just have to remember to cover up the toilet paper. We still have to light the fire a half an hour before—that part hasn't changed, and we have now figured out precisely how long the hot water

will last. We both stand "at the ready" to jump in the moment the other one of us steps out. If you stay a second after the hot water is gone you will be doused with freezing water. Guess how we figured *that* out! So, while you can't stand there and lollygag, there is sufficient time to get clean and wash your hair. There ISN'T time for me to stand and shave my legs. I do that later (with cold water) propping one leg at a time in the little sink.

Other domestic news includes the return of the mice, but these really are mice—little tiny guys, way too small for our Goliath traps. We got some poison (Warfarin, I think) from some other volunteers, sprinkled it around and now each evening, one mouse comes staggering out from somewhere and keels over. Last night one ran around and around with Chuck chasing it with a big stick. He just about had it cornered, when it suddenly plunks over, dead. Probably had a heart attack when he saw Chuck with the stick. I hate to think how many of these critters we have—at times I can hear them squeaking under the wide wooden window seat under the living room windows.

And speaking of animals, the parakeets are not improving. I think they're retarded and have a near terminal case of parakeet lice. I also think it's too cold for them in the house at night since we don't keep any fires going. Chuck has been very nice not to say, "I told you so" but does agree enthusiastically that they need to go. Now I have to figure out how to give them away without hurting Aref's feelings.

We've made some resolutions for the New Year which include: reading a new English book every week, becoming fluent in Farsi, and visiting India or Nepal! Chuck also wants to improve his guitar and I want to improve my bridge, so there is plenty to keep us occupied these winter nights. We've had more snow, by the way, alternating with cold rains. Our heavy warm boots from the States are a Godsend—I smile every time I put them on.

Next weekend we may be able to run off to Jalalabad for a day with an USAID truck going over there. It would be a good chance to see another part of the country.

Chuck is yelling "SHOWER'S READY!" Must run.
Love, your youngest daughter

January 12, 1972
Dear Mother,

I guess it's too soon to expect Christmas news, our mailbox was empty except for the notice that we need more shots. (Happy New Inoculation Year!) We're also going to be given malaria tablets starting in March. We don't have malaria here, it's too cold, but everyone ends up going to the warmer climates in Pakistan and Indian, so we all get them.

The trip to Jalalabad wasn't as interesting as we had hoped. We had heard that there were some famous ruins there called the Hadda (I think) but it was really just a pile of rocks with barely a discernible shape of a corner here and there. I think you have to be an archeologist to appreciate them, or maybe we're spoiled after Bamiyan. At any rate, the Afghans are guarding the area carefully, with a rifle-toting guard who had a very "King of the Mountain" attitude. We didn't stay long. The drive on the Siah-koh highway was the best part, PAVED and winding through deep, dramatic gorges. We'll continue on that same road next week when we go to Peshawer. I can't wait!! Chuck finally made it through all the various Ministries and we have our visas.

We decided to celebrate the New Year and buy a chicken. It's only our second chicken since we've been here, as they are expensive and my last one seemed kind of tasteless. This time I decided to boil the whole thing and make homemade noodles and chicken. We came home and found that Dad Ali had cleaned it, de-feathered it and chopped off its feet and head. We knew that before we got to the kitchen, since he left the feet and head on the porch steps. Gives a sort of third-world

look to your house, don't you think? He knows and understands how we like the inside of the house kept clean, but can't really understand why I care about the outside. I picked it all up and put the mess outside the gate in the *jewie* where some wild dogs snarfed them up almost before I got back inside. Garbage, by the way, is an interesting topic. All left over meat (after every possible bone has been boiled and scraped), is eaten by the animals. Rotten vegetables are buried in the garden or thrown in the *jewies*. There is no garbage pick-up unless you want to count the little children (or sometimes old men) who go around with large aluminum square cans, open on the top, tied to their backs like a knapsack. They roam up and down the *jewies*, looking for any type of recyclable item and often work in pairs so one can throw stuff in the can on the back of the other one. Their pickings are slim and the business is competitive. They pick up paper, any kind of bottle, anything made of metal or rubber and anything that might have the remotest possibility to be reused. And their imaginations along this line put ours to shame. All the paper is cut and made into sacks. In fact if I go down to the corner and buy local cookies (not very good) they always come in a sack made out of an Indian movie star magazine!

Glass bottles are reused forever. All cans are pounded flat and reshaped into new cans. And they don't bother to clean off the old printed labels that were on the outside of the old can. They just re-bend the can so the painted part is inside! When I buy lard and dig down a few spoonfuls on the side, I can begin to see the printing from the can's previous life. I don't suppose the ink adds anything beneficial to the product, but around here, that's the least of someone's worries. I laugh when I think of the lawsuits that would cause in the States!

We had lunch with our student Nik Mohammed last week. He lives with his family in a house that's a far sight better than Dad Ali's, and is more or less like ours. His seemed depressing though as each room just had one naked light bulb hanging down and there were no pictures on the walls. They do have a

"real" stove though and a refrigerator, so they consider themselves lucky. Nik Mohammed looks like a true *Pushtun*. He's tall and thin, and has a narrow face with a long straight nose and intense dark eyes matching dark, wavy hair. He wears sideburns and a mustache. Every time I look at him I can visualize him in a turban, wrapped in tribal robes brandishing a sword. I told him this and he laughed—he doesn't see himself as a warrior. We had a nice *pilau* for lunch, at a table with utensils.

Another woman student of ours, Gul Jan, has insisted on knitting me a sweater. She made me select the yarn a month or so ago and then presented me with a beautiful pullover sweater after class last week. I had tried to pay her for the yarn at the beginning and then I tried to pay for the sweater, but she wouldn't hear of it. She insists this is the LEAST she can do for her teacher. I felt I had to do something, so I made a large banana bread on Friday and walked it over to her house (not far from ours) then the family insisted I stay for lunch! I'm getting *behinder* and *behinder* in this reciprocation business! If you wonder why I'm always giving banana bread, it's because it's the only thing I can bake that always turns out OK. Probably, because I have all the ingredients.

Love, Your youngest daughter

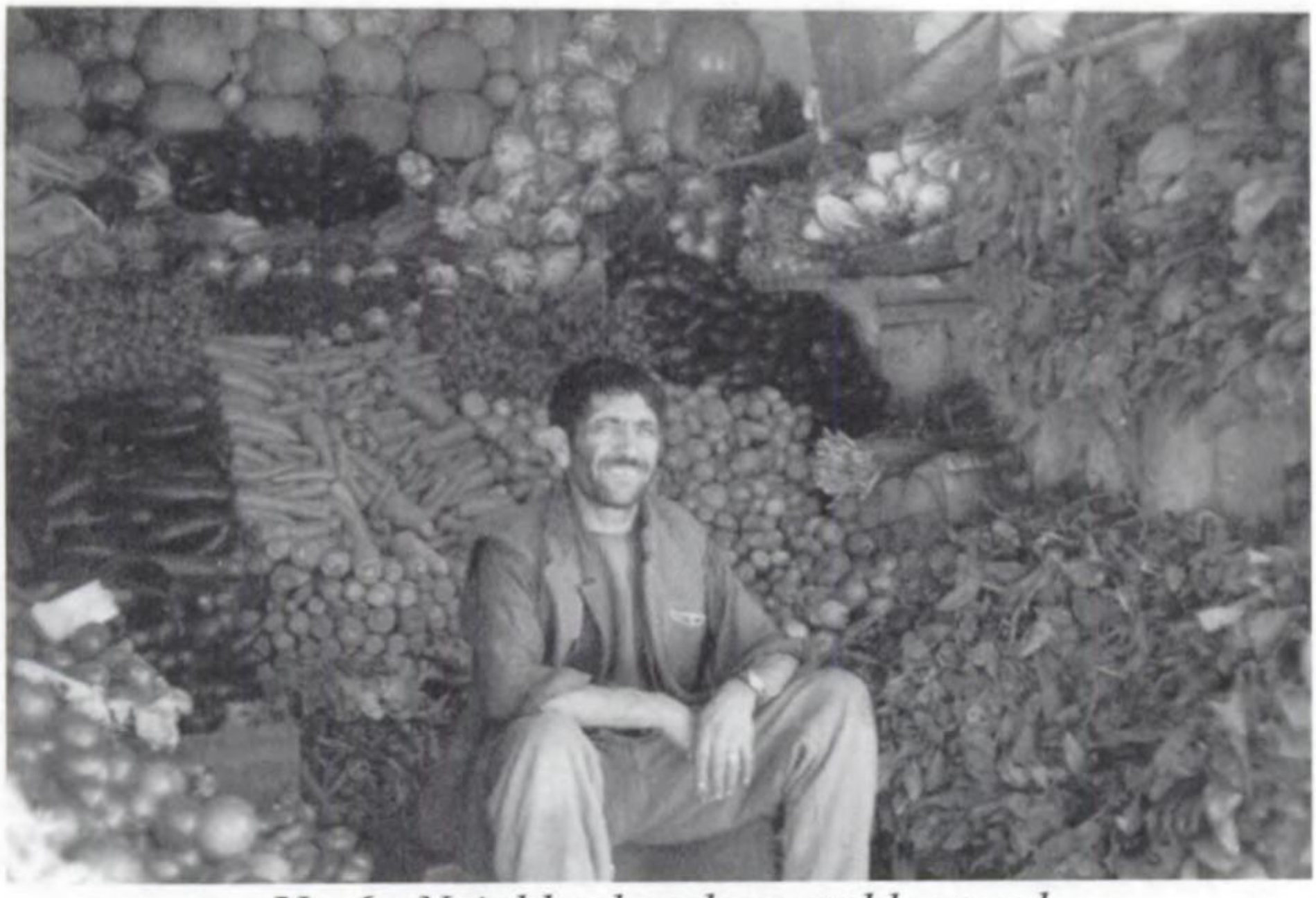
No. 1– My kitchen with spice cabinet, oven "sitting" on kerosene burners.

No. 2– *Living Room with new curtains—charpoy chair in right corner*

No. 3– *Corner outside our gate*

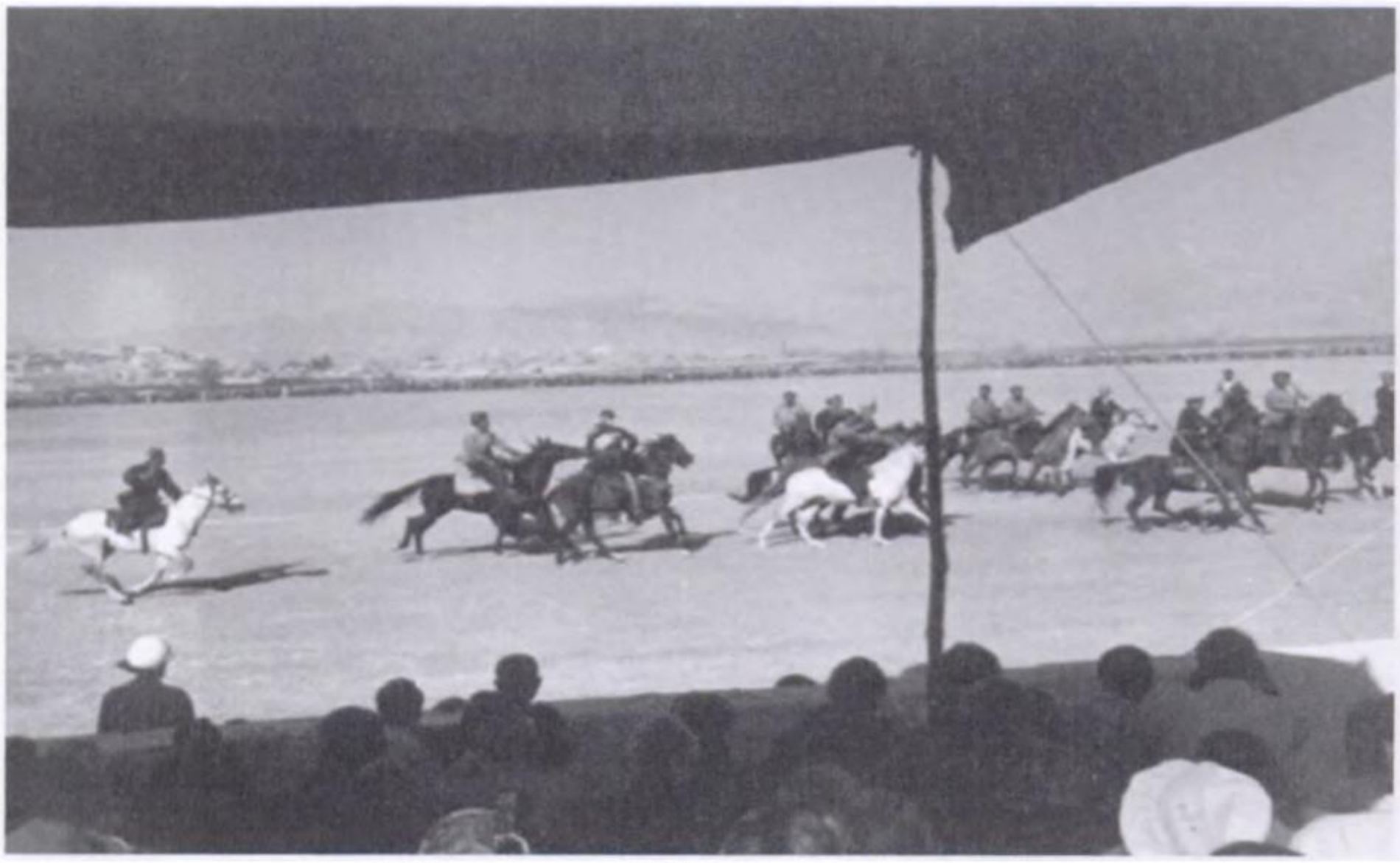
No. 4– *Making 'non'*

No 5– *Hazara boy selling socks in the bazaar.*



No 6– *Neighborhood vegetable stand*

No 7– *Downtown Kabul (Cover Photo)*



No 8 *Buz Kashi from a safe distance.*

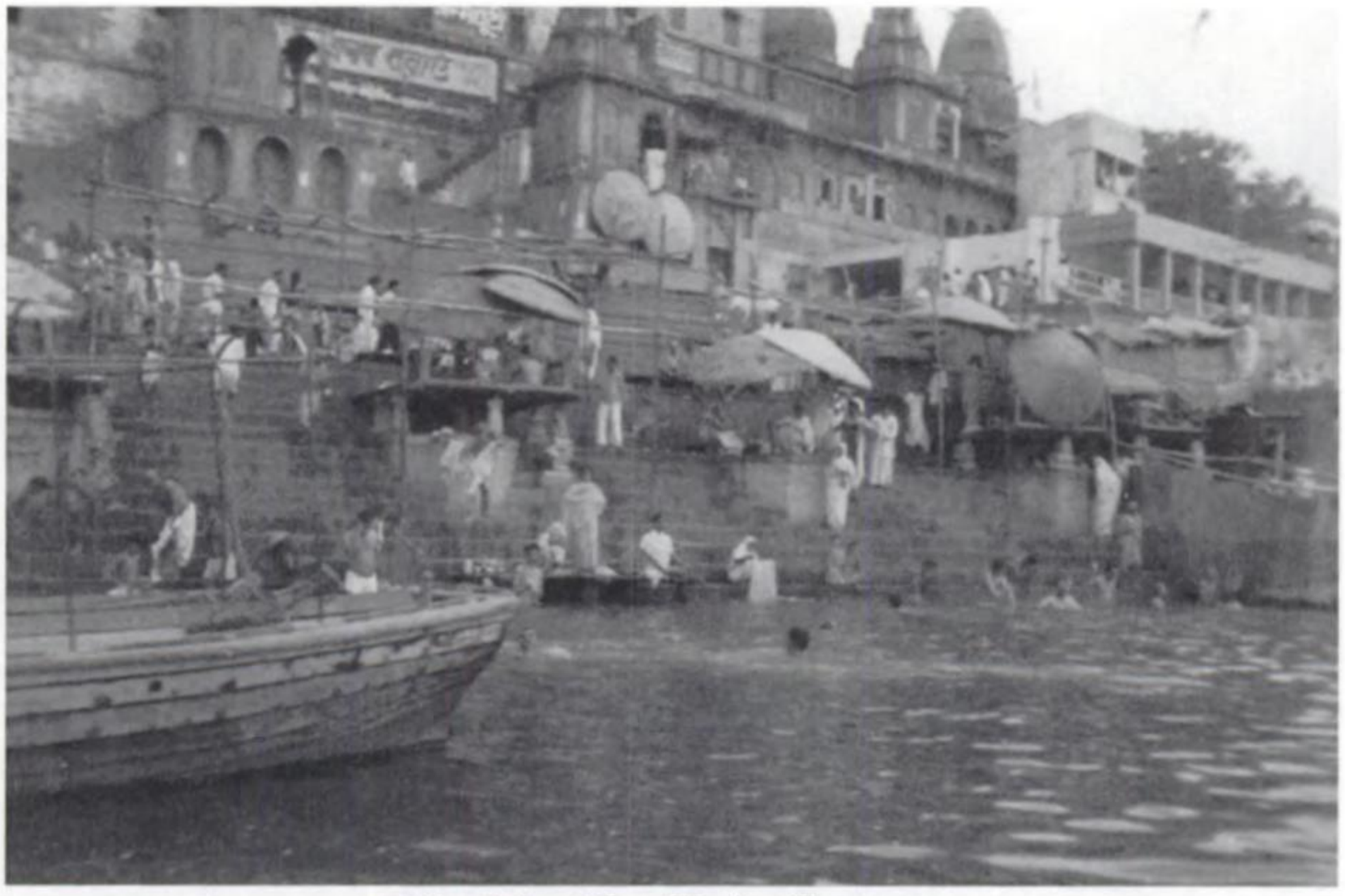
No 9– *Our students in the Ministry. Nik Mohammed at far left.*

No 10– *Crowded avenue to bazaar.*

No. 11 *The Kyber Pass*

No. 12 *Camels on the road to Bandiamir.*

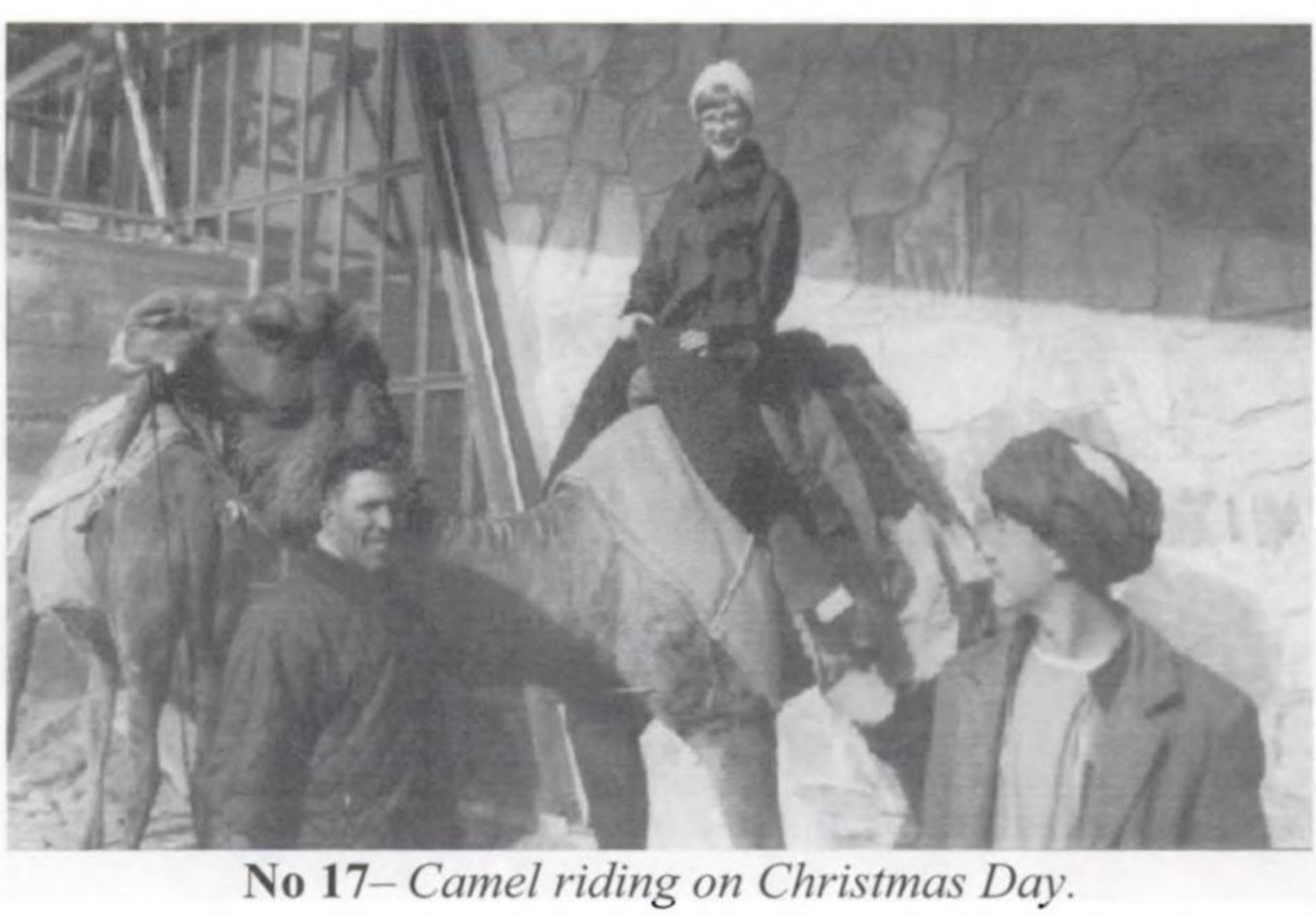
No 13– *In front of the Incomparable Taj Mahal.*



No 14– *The Holy Ganges*

86 – *Eloise Hanner*

No 16– *Chuck in our houseboat in Kashmir.*



No 17– *Camel riding on Christmas Day.*

No.18 *The giant Buddha in Bamiyan.*
I'm at the bottom, waving a straw hat.

Part 3—Beyond the Khyber Pass

January 29, 1972
Dear Mother,

Pakistan was fabulous! We managed to squeeze in the back of the Aylward's VW Bug and left here about 8:00 am last Thursday. We went over the same road we took to Jalalabad the week before, but passed it and then continued through the famed Khyber Pass. Going through the pass, it's easy to understand how difficult it would be invade Afghanistan, at least from the East. I have never even imagined such immense, jagged cliffs. Even with the paved highway, it's a forbidding ascent and descent, with one hairpin turn after another all the way down to the clear Kabul River, which twists its way between boulders along the bottom. Nothing grows on these sheer walls; they are just ominous, jagged masses of gray rock. It seems incredible that they ever managed to build a road at all. Not only is it paved but it also has a guard rail, which gave me comfort—a cement and rock barrier about a foot wide and maybe two feet high.

At the top of the Khyber Pass we crossed over into Pakistan. A century ago, the Fort of a Thousand Rifles (which we could glimpse in the distance) guarded this pass. It is now patrolled by fierce looking tribal men, all carrying rifles with carbines slung over their shoulders. The American Embassy prohibits Americans employees to cross the pass at dark, but it's a moot point since the pass is actually closed at dusk anyway. Actually, the Embassy doesn't want Americans to drive outside of the city after dark—period. While there are still bandits everywhere, they are notoriously bad here. The town at the border

wasn't much more than a few cross streets and ramshackle buildings but every man we saw was armed. They say this is one of the world's most notorious borders for smuggling—drugs, arms, uranium, you name it. The actual border crossing was just a small building and a cross arm across the road. An unsmiling, well-armed guard checked our passports and visas and waved us through, which was a relief. This wasn't a place where you wanted your papers questioned. We didn't even want to get out of the car. After the border, we came down the pass towards Peshawer, and dropped about six thousand feet in altitude. (Kabul sits at seven thousand feet and I believe Peshawer is under one thousand.) When we got out of the car at around 1:30 in Peshawer, it was like stepping into a tropical paradise, warm and inviting with so much GREEN everywhere!

But the most amazing difference was the fact that it was so neat and *so* British. The Afghans are always so proud of the fact that the British were never able to take them over, but when I looked at Peshawer, colonialism seemed like a good deal. All the systems the British left behind, are still working–like a railroad and a Post Office where you can actually go in a buy a stamp! All the streets were clean and lined with big beautiful shade trees. Smart looking Pakistani police guards, wearing starched white shirts, Bermuda shorts and white knee socks, manned the traffic corners. Houses were not behind walls and had white little fences in front. In the center of town there were horse drawn carriages called g*odies* clopping along shady streets. No one stared at us; no one threw stones. Attitudes against infidels, that I had just considered were part of the Islamic culture, weren't apparent. We couldn't believe we were only four hours from our house!

We stayed at a pleasant little hotel called Jan's which was fairly inexpensive, but clean and relaxing plus they served tea and cake in the morning and tea again in the late afternoon. We ate like pigs. We were able to get great Chinese food and the other restaurants had all sôrts of just wonderful steaks and

sauces and salads and cheese. Oh my, for us every meal was better than the last and it was agony having to choose between so many delights on the menu. When we weren't eating, we were shopping. Even on our meager budget we were able to visit their wonderful brass and copper bazaars and pick out some pieces. For a few *rupies*, we were even able to ride around in the *godies*. And here's a weird thing. We went to a shop noted for inlaid woodwork and there in the back of the shop was a wooden desk nameplate showing an example of how they could inlay your name in brass in the wood. The name on the example read: James Pitts, M. D. How could it be that my cousin's name is inscribed here in this small back alley shop in Pakistan? I don't think he's ever been here, has he? And it's hard to believe that there are THAT many physicians named James Pitts. Pretty odd, I thought. You will have to ask him about it. We bought a small coffee table there that has an inlaid chess board on the top and decorations on the legs. The shop owner said the inlaid work was ivory, and it may be, but whatever it is, it looks gorgeous. Normally, we would never be able to get something this "big" home, but the USAID people are able to put all of their things on a truck, and ours gets to sneak in with theirs. The Aylwards will just call it part of their stuff and bring it to us when it gets back to Kabul. We're so excited to see how our new things will brighten up our house. We only stayed two nights, then headed back, but it was so relaxing and so wonderful to be away from the snow and cold and the Afghan culture for awhile.

Tomorrow will be our # 1 anniversary so we're going to continue on our eating binge and go out to eat. We're told there is a German restaurant called the Gulzar that is the perfect romantic place to go. The Aylwards (Mike and Darlene) brought us a bottle of wine for an anniversary present so we can even have an anniversary toast. We'll have plenty to toast to—it's been a pretty exciting first year of marriage.

Love, your youngest daughter

P.S. Came home to a full mailbox!! I was delighted to hear that my little Christmas boxes actually made it there and that everyone liked my Afghan gifts. As you can see the embroidery work is exquisite, even if it's on poor material. If you'd like, I can get just the squares of embroidery and then you can inset them in better quality cloth. Let me know. Also, so glad your Christmas with Rita and Pat was so much fun. I know how cute little Wade must be!

February 15, 1972
Dear Mother,

You see that I've missed a week. We have had so much snow and rain that it's been nearly impossible to get over to the Peace Corps office. And besides, the airport here doesn't have lights, so planes don't land at night OR when it's snowing and there is poor visibility. So, I knew that any letter I wrote wouldn't be going out anyway. Pretty good rationalization, don't you think?

It snowed so much two nights ago that we couldn't even make it to class—sat home and kept warm with our wood burning stoves and contemplated the fact that the toilet no longer flushes. It could be either a broken pipe or the cesspool is full. Either way, we'll have to use the old creepy outhouse until we can get it fixed. Chuck is slogging over to the landlord's house today to see how fast we can get something done.

The cold and snow is getting wearisome. They say this winter has been one of the wettest in Afghan history. The snow is good for the country, but hard to live in. It seems so easy back in the States where every building is heated by just turning a dial and hot water comes out of the tap! And you do your shopping in climate controlled supermarkets! Here all the vegetables in the open markets are frozen and my fingers are likewise when I finish washing them in the freezing water. Several volunteers have had their water pipes burst and have been by here for showers. We do have that much going for us!

We started testing in the Ministry last week to see which students might qualify for the graduate programs in the States. Our test is just the first of many and we are not part of the final selection process. It's hard to imagine how even our best students could attempt graduate work in the States. Not only do they have the language problem but I fear their Bachelor degrees are sub-standard as well. (Especially considering that 50% was considered passing!) If all that weren't enough, the cultural *gap* is more like a cultural Grand Canyon. They have never seen such things as: escalators, televisions, parking meters, supermarkets, freeways, shopping malls, thermostats– the list goes on forever. Plus, they have never dated or even mingled with the opposite sex so they have no idea what is normal or what would be considered out-of-line. Without someone to guide them on the other end, I don't see how they can survive.

We also now have two student teachers with us at the Ministry. These are new volunteers that just arrived three months ago and are finishing up their training. (Just like we student-taught at the University.) Hard to believe we're already considered old-timers! Talk about the blind leading the blind! But I guess we have picked up a few things and we're happy to share our knowledge. It is a little frustrating, though, to be interrupted in the progress we are trying to accomplish.

We started taking a yoga class on the weekend. A couple of other volunteers (friends of the Hohls) found the teacher and got a class going with him. The instructor is an Indian who told us he was sixty although he could pass for forty. I don't know if it's the result of yoga or just being an Indian, but it inspires us to take his class.

Anyway, this fellow is the real deal as far as yoga is concerned and is teaching us all the basic positions. It feels so good to stretch all of my lazy muscles although I'm doubtful I can ever sit in the lotus position with any comfort for any length of time. That's the one where you sit cross-legged on the floor, but the second leg crossed is pulled back up through your legs so both soles of your feet are pointed up. Chuck isn't

even trying that one. Says his body doesn't go that way. I'm counting all of this as exercise, especially since I'm not doing anything else. (The girls' basketball at the University gym fizzled out a long time ago.) We are to repeat the set of positions (takes about a half an hour) every day.

We've now had several volunteers from our group return to the States. After eight months the excitement and novelty of Afghanistan is now gone and what's left is the reality of living in a challenging environment for a long time. The three specific reasons for termination seem to be: 1) tired of feeling crappy and having diarrhea all the time and 2) not having jobs that keep them busy and 3) living with all the restrictions. There are also rumors that a few were found using drugs, which is an automatic trip home. As I've mentioned, we've been most fortunate with our placement at the Ministry and as far as the diarrhea goes, yes we have it all the time, but I've gotten used to it. We are extremely careful with what we eat, drink, how I clean the vegetables, how we wash our hands and the towels we dry them on, etc. etc. but we still have major bouts of nausea and diarrhea almost weekly. This you either learn to live with or go home.

One of the things that keeps us going is the planning of vacations. We get three weeks a year, so we're now mapping out plans for a spring trip to India and possibly Nepal. Or we may spend more time in India and go to Nepal next year. Right now I'm accumulating all the brochures and old guidebooks from other volunteers. Pouring over them is a wonderful way to spend a winter's evening.

Oh, to answer your questions. Yes, the Kuchi nomads still roam the country. They journey through Kabul in the fall and spring on their yearly one thousand-mile round trip from the north to the south. They follow the same path on the outskirts of Kabul and walk along just like they've been doing for centuries. Everyone walks (with the exception of infants and the very old) along their long lines of camels, bands of sheep, donkeys and some HUGE dogs. These dogs are not the Afghan

hound you have heard of, which is built like a greyhound but has long silky white fur. These things are monsters–something out of *Hound of the Baskervilles.* No amount of rocks-in-my-pocket would protect me! Fortunately, they just plod along with the rest of the caravan and we're never very close anyway.

As for your question about topaz, no it doesn't come from here, but from India. Afghanistan is famous for their lapiz lazuli, the deep blue rock. We hope to get some pieces before we leave. Are you interested in some? Let me know.

Love, your youngest daughter

P.S. Ran into some veterinarian volunteers at the Peace Corps office who work down south in Kandahar, who have offered to take our parakeets! I think they view it as a vet challenge to restore their health. We explained to Aref that it was either that or watch them die at our house.

February 25, 1972

Dear Mother,

Plink….plonk….plunk. That's the new melody around the house as the roof begins to leak everywhere. We have an obstacle course of tin cans that is catching most of it. We had just gotten the plumbing problem solved, which entailed digging a new cesspool (!) when this problem started. All the roofs here are just made of thick layers of mud and after a year or two they have to be re-mudded! They can't do this until the snows stop, so in the meantime, we'll just have to live with it. We are assuming, of course, that the snow does come to an end one of these days! They were able to re-dig the cesspool though and it was done in a day, all while we were at work. Rather fortunate that we could miss it. Dad Ali was there all day supervising and informed us with a wrinkled up nose that the smell was "not good."

We get to have a parental experience next week. The Eighmys, a USAID couple have asked us to house-sit and keep an

eye on their two children while they take a week's vacation to Pakistan. They have a full time nanny, and a cook, *and* a gardener so we don't have to do too much—just supervise the kids at night after the nanny leaves, look after their three dogs and keep a general eye on things. It will be weird to play parents for a week—wonder if we'll like it? The other good part of this is that our wood supply is getting low, so this will save us a full week of wood plus food. Plus, of course, we get to live in a USAID house, which for us is the lap of luxury.

At last our student teachers are gone and it is fun to be back in class full time with "our kids" again. We graduated one of my middle level groups and put it with Chuck and his advanced students. Now I've started a new beginners class so am using my Farsi quite a bit, which is good. We still have a tutor, by the way, and we work diligently every day on new vocabulary. We have started to read and are now plowing through the first grade reader—pretty exciting stuff!

We had lunch last week in the home of one of our female students. For some reason that we didn't quite get, (and didn't want to pursue) her husband has left her so she and her infant son have moved back from his family's house to her family's house. (I have yet to meet a young person living on their own.) She told me her baby wasn't well but I was shocked to see how jaundiced it was and how listless. It just gazed at us with sad little yellow eyes and didn't seem to have the effort to even cry. I know I've heard you say that newborns are often jaundiced for a few days but this baby is about six months old. Any idea of what the problem might be? She said she's been taking him to a clinic but so far with few results. No surprise there–their hospitals have such pitiful facilities I doubt if they could even run a blood test. I wish there *was* something I could do, but there isn't. Our Peace Corps office can't treat them and there are no good private hospitals. We have been warned NEVER to go to an Afghan medical facility, as their sterilization is non-existent. You'll be worse after you go in, no matter what your ailment. Rather than that, if we have severe pain or

can't be reached right away by the Peace Corps doctor, we've each been given a bottle of pain pills. Basically, they're opium tablets—says so, right on the bottle. We've taken a few for severe abdominal cramps and I can say for a fact, that they put you OUT and give you very bizarre dreams. We all laugh at the instructions which say to take two every half-hour, for up to eight hours. You would never come back to Earth. After two, you are zonked out and in a deep sleep. I'm not sure if they stop pain or you're just sleeping so deeply you don't feel the pain. Either way, they're damn effective.

There are so many diseases here; it distresses me to see so many people suffering. One of the worst ones is spinal tuberculosis. This destroys the spine so the person can't keep his back upright. The unfortunate souls with this malady get around by fashioning wooden blocks to hold with their hands, and then clump around on all fours. We often see one fellow in particular, who begs in front of the Ministry. There are a fair number of blind beggars competing on that corner as well, their blindness caused from simple glaucoma or there is also a type of parasite that attacks the inside of the eyelid, then the inflamed eyelid scrapes the eye away. I can't imagine the horror of that! No one ever has a wheelchair or a proper set of crutches. Single leg amputees hobble with one home-made crutch, which is usually just a sturdy tree limb with a y-branch at the end, which fits under their arm. Double amputees are set on square wooden boards with small wheels underneath. They wrap their hands in rags, then propel themselves along with their fingers or knuckles.

Anyway, I've strayed from my original story of the lunch, which was a pleasant visit with the customary *pilau*. But like so many of these lunches, we leave feeling depressed because we know they have spent too much money for the lunch.

We're getting to be good friends with Mike Osmera, the volunteer who moved into the Kistler's place next door. He was part of their cycle but opted to extend for a year. When a volunteer does this, they get a round-trip ticket back to the

States and a month's vacation. It works well for volunteers that want to stay and finish a particular project or that simply want to stay another year. At this point in time, I must say I think for us, two years will be sufficient. Anyway, he's a great guy and we have him over often.

Chuck convinced me that my bridge was good enough to go play a game of duplicate bridge, so we went over for the Wednesday night "international game" that they hold at the U.S. Staff house. This is a pleasant little hang-out for Americans (even lowly PCV's are allowed in) and they serve hamburgers and hot-dogs. The hamburgers are a bit of a disappointment as you get your mouth all set for a *real* one and they just don't taste quite right. But anyway, we played and didn't come in last! OK, fourth from last, but I thought it was pretty good for my first time out. May try again in a few weeks.

Not much else to report. We are moving our vacation up to the end of March as we've heard that the clouds come in over Everest and the later you go in the spring the worse the view of the mountains. So, we'll be vacationing in a month! That will get me through these next four weeks of cold.

Your birthday will be here soon. Remember I'll be thinking of you even though I won't be able to send a present. And thanks for forwarding the tax forms, we should be able to file for a little refund.

Love, your youngest daughter

March 10, 1972

Dear Mother,

See how lazy I've become? Skipped another week. I didn't have a snow excuse this time, but a better one. We just got back from our week of house/baby/dog sitting and we came to the realization that being parents takes ALL of your time. Even though the kids (Hope and Lawrence) had the nanny during the day, they needed attention at night. Night is defined as the minute you come in the door until you tuck them in bed and

read a story. It wasn't as though they didn't play well by themselves, it was just that there was always something I felt I wanted to do with them, or one of the dogs needed something or I couldn't find something. After the two of us in our little house, it was like moving into a circus. Lawrence, the little boy grew especially fond of Chuck and Chuck spent a great deal of time playing with him. So, does this make us want to have children? Not really! I realize we're still young, but at this time it seems like life would be more fun without them. I guess sooner or later I'll get that maternal instinct and I'll want to have my own baby, but I certainly don't want one now!

Tom and Bev Eighmy were very generous to us. They brought us back two beautiful miniature pictures from India, some yoga books and a whole box of goodies from the commissary which included: jello, soup, canned ham, bacon, cheese, wine, DILL PICKLES, coffee, V-8 juice and canned corn. We will be able to ration all of this out for months! The pickles are a special treat—haven't had one since we left the States.

All of this bounty led to a breakfast party on Friday for several volunteer friends since the bacon from the Eighmy's had to be used—no way to ration that out without refrigeration. It's been cold enough to keep it outside the kitchen window (or in the kitchen, which has no heat) but that is a sure invitation for rats. Better that we cooked it up with eggs and *non* and instant coffee!

Speaking of rats, we still have the squeaking window seat in the living room and the little mice are spotted from time to time. I suspect that if we pulled the boards up from the window seat we would find a whole nest of them, but neither one of us is up for that job! I can just envision pulling up the last board and seeing hundreds of tiny pink wriggling bodies in some gigantic nest—ye gods, then what would we do with them?! I suggested that we might want to get a cat, but Chuck gave me "that look." Considering the state of arrival of the parakeets, it would probably have cat leprosy or something.

We now have our vacation all mapped out. It's basically a trip to Nepal and to Kashmir. We're going to fly to Delhi as the border is still closed between Pakistan and India, then continue on to Nepal the following morning, also by air. That doesn't leave any time for Delhi, but we plan to spend more time in Delhi on a trip next winter. After Nepal we're flying back to Delhi and taking a train to Kashmir where we plan to spend a week on one of their fabled houseboats. We'll fly home from there. I can't tell you how excited we are! I think it would be an exciting trip for anyone, but living here makes us long for freedom!

I think spring is really here now. Five days ago it tried to snow, but turned to rain. Today, the sun is shinning and it's almost warm outside. Next week, in fact is the Muslim New Year, called "Nau Roz" and we will progress from 1350 to 1351. Traditionally, families would slaughter a sheep and anoint the ground with blood. Today, most people in Kabul get the day off and many paint their knuckles red in remembrance of the old ways. (Ha- I almost wrote odd ways!) Spring does fill me with cheer though and I'm hoping to plant some little flowers along the window in front. It also means that our very kind and attentive landlord will get a new mud roof for us. He really is a doll, always so anxious to see that we are comfortable and happy.

Our friends the Clarks have decided to leave. They are part of our cycle and we've been through a lot together, so we're sorry to see them go. It's hard to say what was the final straw, they are just very unhappy here. On the plus side, they're leaving us their bicycles, for free! All the bicycles here are made in India and are black, single speed with brakes on the handlebars. Ours also have a bell on the handlebars to ding and a small generator on the back wheel to power the light in front. We don't actually plan to be riding at night, but should we get caught at dusk, you just move the lever over and pedal away. Of course it's like peddling with the back brake on, but it does light the way! We picked them up yesterday and have been rid-

ing all over the place. It was perfect timing, since all the snow in the roads is gone. One of the Peace Corps families, Ralph and Marie Jackson and their children only live a mile or so from our house. On the bikes it's an easy trip and we inaugurated our bikes with a visit to them. Of course we had to stay for tea and cookies, which Marie always has available! Ralph is an architect and has been assigned to the University. He faces the same problems of the strikes and lost days that all the volunteers have there, but bears it in good humor. Their three children are enrolled in the American school here and Marie also volunteers part-time teaching English.

It's haircutting time again. Chuck has the fire lit in the bathroom so we'll go in there where it's warm and take turns getting "cut" then rinse off all the hair with the nightly shower. Chuck's actually getting to be a pretty good haircutter but he says he hates doing it (makes him nervous) and said once we're back in the States—never again!
Love, your youngest daughter

March 22, 1972
Dear Mother,

By the time you get this letter, we'll be in Nepal! We leave in nine days and are counting down! Chuck's been doing all the legwork on the visas, reservations and plane tickets. He's beginning to wonder if the trip is worth all the effort—I certainly hope so.

It's been an interesting week of entertainment. One of the American Peace Corps staff members, a single man named Marty, invited a number of us to his house for dinner. Marty has lived here for years, his Farsi is perfect and he was one of our cultural advisors during training. We enjoyed a great buffet dinner and afterwards, when we're all sitting around in his living room munching on cookies, his big German shepherd appears at the doorway. Marty says "come in and lie down." The dog comes in and lies down. Then Marty says "why don't you

introduce yourself" so the dog gets up and goes to the first person and sniffs his shoe. "That's not polite," Marty reprimands, "you'd better leave." And immediately the dog tucks his tail between his legs and leaves the room. Marty then calls him back and asks if he is sorry. The dog nods his head up and down. "Now, would you like to introduce yourself properly?" Again, the dog shakes his head up and down. He then starts around to each of us, extending his paw and after we take it, he gives two little woofs. About half way around the circle Marty asks him if he is tired. The dog nods yes. "What would you like to do?" Marty asks him and the dog lies down, curls into a ball and pretends to sleep! It was such a delight and so fun to watch. Marty had a pocket full of doggie treats and he would slip one to him each time he completed a trick. Everyone has to come up with ways to entertain themselves here and this was obviously how Marty spends his off-duty hours.

Our other night out was a musical evening put together by USIS (United States Information Services.) It was designed to be a cross-cultural evening, where we would have authentic Afghan music played by Afghans, followed by American music, played by Americans. There had been an announcement about a month ago, seeking volunteers to represent the American side. Chuck thought this would be fun, so he had organized a folk singing group, with him on the acoustical guitar, and Mike Hohl and Charlene Hephner singing. They had been practicing for about two weeks and had some great numbers. We all met at the USIS center and the Afghan groups performed first. Their traditional music is actually quite good and the performers were excellent. Then there were two American groups, one was Chuck's and the other was heavy-metal electrical band, composed of high school kids from the American school. We thought they were perfectly dreadful, but the Afghans loved the "electrical" sound. Unfortunately, when Chuck's quieter folk music group came to the stage, the Afghans had lost interest and were talking and laughing among themselves and paying no attention. Chuck and the others were

disappointed and angry that the Afghans were so rude and inconsiderate. I doubt if they realized how impolite we thought they were. It's ironic that the *musical* differences were less significant than the *appreciation* differences! But, on the plus side, Chuck and the others did have a good time working together and I thought (and so did the rest of the Americans there) that they were terrific!

And speaking of entertainment, Dad Ali somehow came across an old Viewmaster with one cardboard circle of pictures of the Swiss Alps. He is absolutely entranced. Clicks it around and around, oohing and aahing each time. Since he's never been to a movie and there is no television in the country, this is the first time he's seen three-dimensional pictures of someplace else. He's not alone in this distinction, few Afghans have. Even among our educated students, only one or two have ever been to the cinema. It's partly due to no money and to the fact that they only show Indian movies with Indian music and (no offense to the Indians!) not really appealing to anyone who's not from India. At any rate, Dad Ali just loves this "modern" Viewmaster and finds it hard to believe when I tell him that it is considered old- fashioned and people aren't interested in them any more.

The rest of the week's evenings were spent as usual, sitting in our little living room, reading. Since we have two lights hanging from the ceiling, I sit under one and Chuck sits directly under the other one. That puts me on the cushions against the wall, next to the wood stove and Chuck on the other side, stretched out on the *charpoy* couch. Chuck's about half way through with *War and Peace* (loves it) and I'm plowing through Strindberg plays. I am also entertained by listening to Chuck play and practice the guitar every day.

I doubt if I can get another letter off before we leave, so expect a postcard and a letter from Nepal! Should you need to reach us, the Peace Corps office here has all of our destinations, so can track us down.

Much love, your youngest daughter

April 6, 1972
Dear Mother,

I am sitting in a small, clean little hotel, just down the street from the American Embassy, here in Katmandu, Nepal. We made it to Nepal with few hassles. Mike Aylward took us to the airport and we took an Ariana (the national airline of Afghanistan) flight in to Delhi. We spent the night there at the YMCA, which had been recommended as a good, cheap, clean, place and it was on all accounts. Delhi, at first glance looks "Delhi-ightful" and will look forward to our visit here next year.

We got up the next morning at five a.m. to catch the small Indian Air prop plane to Katmandu. We shuffled sleepy-eyed through the lines to the small waiting room and sat down, prepared to read when Dracula swooshed in and sat next to us. He introduced himself as Anthony and said that he was from Spain, but he looked straight out of Transylvania. He had pale skin, black hair slicked back, glittery black eyes and long fingernails. But the pièce de résistance was his flowing black cape to the floor. "I am going to see the King of Nepal," he told us. "Would you not care to come with me?" He carried a briefcase under his cape, so we supposed he might have official business in there, but we weren't sure we wanted to hook up with this guy. We declined politely–hadn't packed the right clothes anyway!

The flight into Katmandu was spectacular. The Himalayans in sparkling white splendor rose up on all sides as we flew down into an emerald valley—a picture perfect Shangri-La. Everywhere you look it's green and all the hillsides are terraced for crops or gardens. Houses have upturned eves on the roofs, like the Chinese and there are pagodas, temples or small shrines on every block. Some have wonderful carvings of Hindu gods—Shiva with its eight arms or strange monkeys. What a difference to be in a Buddhist/ Hindu culture—Buddha

was born here, by the way. Women are in colorful clothes, many in gorgeous saris, and not a *chaudrie* to be seen. Bare arms even!! They love their porno here, although that's not putting it quite right since they don't really consider it pornographic. I'm not sure if it's the Hindu influence or the Buddhist influence, but they consider all aspects of lovemaking a form of art. I bought two little carved wooden panels displaying various positions—not something to hang in the living room, (or *any place* in our house in Kabul) but they could be hung on a bedroom wall in the States.

We rented bicycles the first day and went all around, stopping at cute little shops, flower gardens and stone temples and little shrines for Buddhist prayers. We couldn't have picked a more wonderful spring day. I didn't realize how liberating it would feel not to be stared at all the time. No one even notices us here. The second day we decided to take the trek up the mountain and stay overnight in a place called The Mount Everest Lodge. From there, we had heard, you can get a good look at Mt. Everest at dawn. We packed an overnight backpack (with swimsuits in case the lodge had a pool) a small lunch, a bottle of water and set off. "Can't miss it," we were told. " Just follow the trail until it ends." Someone had said it was about four miles, so after an hour of walking continually uphill on the dusty little path, we sat down and had our lunch.

We continued on and on and finally passed some English girls coming down. "It's at least eight miles," they said, so we kept on for another two hours, thinking that we would see the lodge around the next bend. But the next bend would reveal nothing. By then we were getting rather weary. It wasn't climbing in the sense of having to grab on to anything, but just a steady uphill go. After four hours, we only had a few swallows of water left in our jug and we were getting so tired we were just silly. We had sat down on a tree stump to rest when two little Nepalese boys appeared out of nowhere and seemed to understand our question of "How far to hotel?" especially when we put our hands together and against our cheeks to indi-

cate sleep. "Mont Evest Loge," they both piped up, "Verey near!" I don't know about the VERY part, but in about a half an hour we came across a few small shacks to the side of the trail and true enough, the trail did sort of dissolve at that point. As we came nearer, a wizened up little Nepalese lady came out towards us and asked "you want eat?" It was about that moment that we saw it– a small, weathered board, nailed to a tree with *Mt. Everest Lodge* carved in it. And I had thought there might be a pool! We did end up with a clean bed, cold outside showers and an outhouse, but given our weariness and no other alternatives, it was quite sufficient. Plus, we got a nice hot meal of rice and a sort of beef stew and had a good time laughing at two other weary travelers who came straggling in after us, on the *four-mile* trail. Try twelve and a half!

We got up in the dark the next morning and with some small boys guiding us, made our way to the "best for view" place, which was just the hill behind the lodge, but we gave them a few coins anyway. We sat there shivering as the black night faded to dark gray, then light gray and then stayed that way. There were no glorious hallelujah sunrays, there was no pink horizon, and there was no mountain. There was only the densest fog you could imagine. Finally we could make out the sun as a red orb and that *was* rather attractive, but as for a mountain view, we might as well have been in the Sahara. We just shrugged—the Mount Everest Lodge and the Mount Everest view hadn't quite lived up to the billing, but it had been fun. We went back to the lodge, picked up our backpack and made it back down to Katmandu before lunch.

Today we both find that our knees are killing us. Coming down the stairs of our hotel it was so painful I actually had to turn around and go down backwards! We ran into some hippie types at breakfast who informed us that it was from the muscles used on the downhill part of the hike.

Speaking of hippies, this place is crawling with them. Actually, *hippy* is the wrong term. All the volunteers call them *W. T.*'s, short for World Travelers. They come from all over, but

more from Europe, than the States, and in general are a pretty sorry lot. They follow what is known as the hashish trail, which goes from Turkey, all across Asia to here and they generally remain smoked up most of the way. In Nepal, as a matter of fact, hashish is legal and as far as I know, so is every other drug. Most of these W.T.'s are about our age, many of them have hardly any money, and are usually dressed in ragged, gauzy clothing they picked up in India. They're dirty, with long straggly hair and often approach us asking for money. They never have enough money to stay in any place but a complete hovel and never can go anywhere or do anything that costs anything either. Some vacation, hey? They just hang around outside cafes, smoke dope and give a very bad impression of western youth.

We did manage to get over to a place called Balajus this morning, a combination park and fish hatchery that boasts a rather famous statue of a floating Buddha surrounded by snakes. On one side of the park was an olympic sized pool, so we finally got to use our bathing suits, which were still in the backpack. We were the only people there, so had the pool and the place to ourselves.

This afternoon we got our first taste of a monsoon rain. One minute the sky was perfectly blue, the next it was black and it absolutely poured—you couldn't even see a foot! We're now in the drying stage here in our room. Oh, and we ran into Anthony again (this time sans cape) who says, "yes, I did see the King!" Maybe we should have taken him up on his offer.

We have two more days here. We plan to visit the Chinese border tomorrow and do some more sightseeing. Will be writing again soon, probably from India next time.
Love, Your damp, youngest daughter

April 12, 1972
Dear Mother,

I write you from the comfortable front porch of a small inn in Amritsar, India. It's owned and operated by a little grandmotherly Indian woman named Mrs. Bendarie who is insulted if you don't have three helpings of everything. We just finished a lunch of salad, soup, roasted meats with tomato sauce, rice, okra, curried vegetables, dessert and fruit. I could barely make it out here to the porch! We leave tomorrow for the fabled Kashmir, so this afternoon we have nothing scheduled but to relax, catch up on correspondence and wash clothes.

I last left you in Nepal before our trip to the Chinese border. The greatest thing about that was the scenery coming and going. It's a smooth paved road and it winds through stunning, snow capped mountain passes with a beautiful clear river that rushes along the side. The only thing I didn't like was the taxi driver who seemed like he was practicing for the Indy 500. I know he was thinking, "how fast can I get to the border and back, dump these tourists and pick up some more?" Our doors were barely closed when he peeled away from the sidewalk, screeching and dodging in and out of the traffic until we were clear of the city, where we buzzed through the countryside. We arrived at the border in less than two hours, which has to be some kind of record. The border itself, which is only a bridge, can only be peeked at from a distance—no one allowed (except Chinese) the last one hundred yards. But we could see two Chinese guards, with their little blue uniforms against a stunning view of the Himalayas. We waved and gave them the peace sign and took a picture, which is supposedly illegal, but they were too far away to tell if we had a camera and I seriously doubt that they really cared. They would hardly have been able to "give chase" anyway, as we quickly got back in the taxi and taxi-man roared out at his usual velocity. Down the road we did slow down enough to make a stop at some reputed hot springs we had read about, but the springs turned out to be just a single shower head spouting hot water with several very

old and completely naked (!) Nepalese women standing under it. Pass!

We left Katmandu in another Indian Air prop plane to Banaras, (also called Varanasi) India, home of the fabled Holy Ganges River and one of the fabled seven holy cities for Hindus. It was only April, but it was already too hot and damp for a walk so we decided to rent a rickshaw and spent the afternoon riding around feeling like British Imperialists. The city now seems dirty and crowded but we were told that in the beginning it was a scene of rolling hills, lush forests and natural springs. We saw literally hundreds of temples and stopped here and there for neat shops and a scarf factory. I bought all sorts of small things we could carry. Can't tell you what—may be next years Christmas present!

The following morning was the real reason for the stop–a guided boat trip down the Ganges River. This river and the town too, have been holy places for Hindus for over three thousand years. Like *everything* in Asia, it is best viewed at sunrise, so again, we had to get up pre-dawn. (I think I've gotten up more times in the dark on this trip than in the rest of my life put together!) We got on our boat in the dark and as the sun ascended my expectations of the river descended. It was dirty—completely brown. I couldn't tell if it was muddy or polluted, but I'm guessing polluted. Women were holding their sick children at the banks, splashing the water on them, others were bathing, some sitting on the banks meditating, and then of course some bodies were being burnt on pyres near the water. The morning was gray and misty and we pushed through the murky waters watching all the solemn activities in silence. It was almost spooky and we found ourselves whispering, like you do in a church.

We could see more temples along the shores of the river, but our guide told us more have been destroyed by Muslim armies than we saw there now. He explained to us as we went along that the waters are believed to be a fluid medium of Shiva's divine essence. If you bathe in the water, all your sins are

washed away; if you can arrange to die here, you are said to be liberated while still alive and if you are cremated here, you will end the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. For this reason, thousands of Indians, dead or alive, walk or are carried here. The worst of the tour was the last five minutes. We got out of the boat and found ourselves at the bottom of a long boat ramp, about fifty yards long, which was the direction you had to go to leave the place. Lining the boat ramp, all the way to the top and on both sides, were hundreds of beggars, most with some kind of deformity, each one crying and holding out a tin can. Between us we only had the equivalent of about a dollar of change in our pockets. We each gave a few coins to the first couple of people on my left and immediately the whole line surged forward as now they EACH hoped that we would give them something. It was awful as we didn't have more to give and these people were all in wretched condition. We both just looked down and walked as quickly as we could to the top.

We continued on to Delhi, back to our comfortable Y, and got some practical shopping done, mainly some new clothes and even new t-shirts for Chuck with normal neck holes! Back in the States I had heard people say they thought India was dirty and depressing, but we love it. Green trees and gardens everywhere, and color exploding—everything from parrots in the trees to the saris of the women. We can eat great food cheaply and even went to a REAL movie. Did the tourist thing for an afternoon and saw the Red Fort, but didn't have time to do it justice, as it is miles around and filled with gorgeously carved walls and whole rooms detailed in inlaid stone. They call it a fort but it's really a protected imperial palace. We'll have to spend several days here next year just to see the sights around Delhi since this attraction is only one of several "must sees." That night found us on a night train on to Amritsar in a FIRST CLASS compartment, which is still ridiculously inexpensive. We had been advised to get a private compartment because 1) they're cheap and 2) you will still have your luggage when you wake up. We heard of a volunteer who took

"bench" class (lowest) to save money and chained his luggage to the iron rail of the bench. When he awoke in the morning the chain was still around the bench, but the luggage was nowhere in sight.

The train station in Delhi is something to behold. It's about the size of two football fields with hundreds of tracks, hundreds of platforms, trains coming and going and total chaos everywhere. Zillions of people, stacks of luggage, boxes and crates, beggars, children, vendors and on top of all the noise they are making, a loudspeaker is calling out train arrival and departure numbers, which you can't even start to hear. Much to our relief we discovered that there was a small army of Indians running around in red jackets and red caps. You simply give them your ticket and follow closely on their heels. Our man led us up and over and around and finally got us on board the right train. We tipped him well!

Our compartment had two bunk beds, no linens, but that was OK because we had our sleeping bags. There was a bathroom at each end of the car with a small sink, a mirror and a toilet. The toilet just emptied out on the tracks so when you lifted up the toilet seat, the tracks were whizzing below beneath you! Chuck said he felt like a character from Agatha Christy and was sure the train was full of spies and thieves. We did lock our door!

We confess to being a little weary and almost wish we were headed home now instead of Kashmir, but we don't feel we can miss seeing these places since we may never get back over here. So, on to new adventures.
Love, your youngest daughter

April 20, 1973
Dear Mother,

Landing in Srinagar, the Indian capital of Kashmir brings into immediate focus that the area is still under dispute. The airport was heavily guarded, with all types of tanks and artil-

lery, planes covered with camouflage and soldiers (with rifles) all over the place. Kashmir has actually been in dispute between India and Pakistan ever since the British left in 1947. Since the area is both Moslem and Hindu, Pakistan wants it for their side and India feels the Hindus should get the choice of staying with India. Now there is a line drawn through the area, called the "Line of Control" and India has the actual "Vale of Kashmir" while Pakistan rules to the west. On beauty alone, Kashmir is worth fighting over. It's called the Switzerland of the East and is a stunning valley between the Himalayas and a second mountain range called the Pir Panjal. Where we stayed at Srinagar is a small blue lake set in the middle of these two mountain ranges. The lake was smaller than I had imagined and quite shallow—I'm guessing about twelve to twenty feet deep. Everyone comes here to stay in the houseboats, so the shores are lined with them and it's quite the business. Each one is large, ours had two bedrooms and two baths and comes with a full time servant that cooks your meals. The interior of ours was decorated lavishly in heavy Persian carpets and dark maroon drapes, lots of dark wood, and big overstuffed couches with Persian throw pillows. A tad lugubrious for my tastes, but it did make you feel like royalty. The gondola rides were the highlight. Having never been to Italy, I can't say how they compare to those, but we thought these were grand. Chuck and I got to lean back on cushions under a woven cover of cane in the middle of this long narrow boat, while the Indian gondola man poled us around to various shops. The lake had numerous inlets, all lined with different kinds of shops that sold a variety of handicrafts—some had wood carvings, others embroidery, others rugs.

Of course you have to recognize it's a bit of a racket, as your boat man is going to take you to the shops of all of his friends, but that was fine with us. We weren't the biggest spenders, but we did have great fun looking at everything and buying small pieces here and there where we could. We visited one shop where five children were working on this enormous

rug. They told us it would take two years to complete and were quick to add that the children only worked there part time and went to school half-days. I had my doubts about that, but there was no proof one way or another. We couldn't buy anything there anyway—too expensive for us! Later we rented our own paddle-boats (water-bicycles, they call them) and went all around going down the passages that our gondola had missed.

Our flight out on the 15th was canceled, (Indian Airlines has a habit of doing this!) so we had to return to our houseboat and wait until the next available one which didn't come through until the 18th. Meanwhile, I got sick, with something I ate no doubt, and spent twenty-four hours in the dark bedroom (and bathroom) while it absolutely poured outside. A good time to be sick, since there was no going anywhere anyway. Chuck and the servant did everything they could to make me better but it's just a matter of time and whatever it is will pass through your system. Sure enough, on the 17th I was fine. There still weren't any flights though, so Chuck spent all of that day finishing *War and Peace* and I continued with *Of Human Bondage*. Finally, we were able to get a flight back to Amritsar on the 18th.

So, here we are back on Mrs. Bendarie's porch, hoping for a flight tomorrow. We were told to show up at the airport at noon, for a possible 4:00 o'clock flight. We have our fingers crossed as are anxious to get home. Not only are we running out of money, but we can't wait to get back to our house–mud roof, mice and all.

We did make a trip to town this morning to pick up a few items and couldn't resist an Indian boy selling swords, full-sized weapons that look like something out of the "Charge of the Light Brigade." I don't know what possessed us, other than they were cheap, and probably impossible to buy anywhere else on the planet. I'm serious when I tell you they're the real thing and could nail a man to the wall or whack off his head. As an elegant touch, they have velvet scabbards! Now we'll see how we get them home!

I can't decide if I'm more struck by how much I've learned about the history of India and Nepal or by how little I knew about it in the first place. You would have thought that somewhere along in my education, there would have been a course on Asian history. Looking back it seems every course started with Egypt and went west. An American student (unless they are a history major) never learns one thing about any country from Turkey all the way to Japan! Realizing this, I can now read on my own, but doesn't that strike you as a serious omission?

Well, with any luck, *enshalla*, we'll be home tomorrow night, lighting the *bokarie* for our showers.
Love, your youngest daughter

April 28, 1972
Dear Mother,

Home at last—I never thought Afghanistan would look so good. We flew in on a beautiful clear day and the clouds and mountains were as spectacular as anything we'd seen. Chuck said maybe we should have just flown around a few times and called that our vacation!

Just before I left I had planted the flower seeds you sent me in front of my front room windows in a little planter bed marked off by stones. With the exception of the petunias, most of them are now two-inch sprouts. I can see now why gardeners buy petunias in flats, as those seeds, even after three weeks, are still micro-dots of green. I have great hopes of beautiful flowers all across my front windows this summer.

"THUD-THUD-THUD" That was the sound we heard in the middle of the night last night and we bolted awake, peering around in the darkness. We could hear rain outside but nothing else. Chuck eased out of bed, got out his new Indian sword (that he now keeps under the bed) and with that in one hand, and the flashlight in the other, crept around the house checking for intruders while I cowered under the covers. He even ven-

tured outside to check the front gate but couldn't find anything amiss, so crawled back in bed (somewhat damp) and we quickly dropped back to sleep. This morning we discovered the thudding was the collapse of the shed wall. Now there's just this huge mound of mud on the ground and a very big opening in the wall. I guess it doesn't matter much since all we keep back there is firewood, but we'll tell the landlord about it and see if he wants to repair it.

We are now into our summer schedule. We get up at 6:30, have tea, *non* and jam, ride our bikes to the Ministry and start classes at 8:00. We take a lunch break at noon, usually at a local café or kabob shop and finish at 2:00. Then we bike home, unless it's Wednesday, when we bike to the Peace Corps office and check mail. Having the bicycles is wonderful. We can get there almost as fast as on the bus and we get exercise at the same time. Plus it saves me fleabites, which you are guaranteed on every bus ride. On my last bus ride I could actually see them jumping from a woman onto me! For further exercise and enjoyment, we joined the American Recreation Center so we can now use their tennis courts and swimming pool—safely behind high compound walls. My tennis skills are pretty nonexistent, but I noticed they offered some group lessons on Friday, so maybe I can join in those and get started. Now that the days are longer there's plenty of time to do outside activities after classes.

Our students were delighted to have us back and for our advanced students we were able to have several discussions about India and Nepal and how they were alike and different from Afghanistan. Even though India and Nepal are neighboring countries, the students still lack knowledge about how life actually is in another country. Most of our students have never been even as far as Peshawer, Pakistan.

Oh, here's an interesting tid-bit for you. While we were talking about the Indian burial practices of cremation, we wandered off to the topic of American burials. They had already explained their burial practices where the body is washed,

(usually by the family,) wrapped in a white sheet and buried within twenty-four hours. I explained how we embalm people and as my explanation got more detailed, I could see a look of horror spreading across their faces. They thought they whole practice was absolutely dreadful and thought I was joking. I must say, that when you describe it to someone, it does sound pretty awful.

You mentioned the Afghan coats you've seen in import stores and I remember the ones you are talking about. The coats are called *Pushtoons* and the nice ones here are not edged in that scraggly wool you describe, but the very tightly curled *karakul* fur, that is also used for the men's caps. There are really some beautiful ones here and probably go for about twenty-five or thirty dollars. I may try to get one before we go home. Would you like for me to look for one for you?

I expect it will be close to Mother's Day by the time you receive this, so Happy Mother's Day. I'll be thinking of you and sending thoughts of love.

Love, your youngest daughter

May 10, 1972
Dear Mother,

Hey! Guess What??!! We just got your Christmas boxes!! Finally, FINALLY, they all made it here—a box from you and the Hanners and Linda and Don and Rita and Pat—Bonanza! All the other volunteers got their boxes too, so now everyone is going around asking, "whad'ya get for Christmas?" I will write everybody individually to tell them thanks but simple thanks doesn't seem enough. From Linda we got notebooks, a calendar (gorgeous), dried soup mixes, cocoa, salad dressings, taco mixes, a Spanish rice mix, two English novels and plastic sacks (really needed). The Hanners sent caramels, Kool-Aid, more salad dressings, paperbacks and potholders. From Rita came a puzzle, more books, seeds and spices. And from you, the wonderful sunglass clip-ons, (a perfect fit for my glasses) chili

powder, gravy mixes, good thread, lipstick, shampoo, nylons and underwear for Chuck. I can't tell you how much we loved it all. We decided to have a celebration Christmas dinner with a barbecued chicken, salad with the new dressings, baked potatoes and yogurt pie. Yogurt pie might sound strange, but its actually quite good and one of the few desserts (besides banana bread) that always turn out well. We will now ration out the rest of the goodies for months.

My flowerbed has been having a rough time of it. After the last rainstorm, it looked like about half of my cosmos crop was wiped out. I had more seeds, so started some new batches—this time keeping them inside for awhile. Then I went out the other day only to find that the birds have eaten the remaining ones down to nothing! Wasn't sure it was birds, until I saw one munching down. Some farmer I am—didn't even know that birds ate flower seedlings. That prompted a trip down to the main bazaar and a search for the chicken-wire section. We got a nice big piece and now have a little chicken-wire roof over the planter. Now, maybe between my protected planter and my new seedlings we might have flowers this summer.

With spring comes baseball and the Peace Corps/Afghan football team has been resurrected into the Peace Corps/Afghan baseball team. I'm not sure the results will be any better. Afghans, like most Asians, learn to play soccer, if they play anything at all, and can kick a ball like crazy. But throw a ball? Chuck says they all throw like girls. I guess if you don't learn it as a child, it doesn't come naturally. But they're all very eager and try so hard that nobody gets too upset. Chuck came home from the game last week with a sprained finger—the ring finger on the left hand. His finger was already swollen when he came home and we tried in vain to get the wedding band off, but even with soapy water, there was no way. We thought it might go down overnight but when we awoke the next morning it was worse. The finger was bluish and there were red streaks running down into his palm. We both decided it looked serious, so we biked over to the Jack-

sons (as a family they have a phone) and called the P.C. Dr. at his home, since we didn't want to wait until Saturday. We described the situation and Dr. Johnson said, "Well, you can come down and we'll cut the ring off today, or you can wait and we can cut the finger off on Saturday." We opted for the former. He met us at the P.C. office and had this nifty little saw gizmo that cut right through the ring. It was a little sad to see our wedding band sawed in half (I actually got tears in my eyes) but I'm sure we can get it re-soldered somewhere and the finger *is* more important! The finger immediately improved in color and in a few weeks should be back to normal. Dr. Johnson, by the way, is the replacement for Dr. Rollins and is an equally wonderful doctor for us.

It was bound to happen sooner or later. Remember the "W.T." travelers I told you about in Nepal? Well, they come through here too, especially as the weather gets warmer, and they manage to offend just about everybody. The women wear these see- through gauze shirts (without a bra of course) and I find that it shocks even me! Four French kids of this ilk were here in Kabul and went down on a camping trip to Kandahar. Word was they were selling hash.

During the night the local Mullah decided that it was his duty to put an end to them, so he crept up to their campsite while they were sleeping and cut off all their heads! It took awhile to find this out since most parents of kids like these have no idea where their children are, but eventually, someone told someone and the headless bodies were found. Of course the French Embassy is furious and demands that the Mullah be brought to justice, but here, and especially in the provinces, the Mullah *is* the law. He told authorities from Kabul that God told him to do it, and that's that. If God told him to do it, it must be OK! So, I seriously doubt if there will ever be any repercussions at all. Nobody deserves to be beheaded while sleeping, but it just points out that this can be a dangerous country if you don't follow the rules and customs. All of us, at one time or another, have gone up to these W.T.'s and told them to "cover

up" and to "stay away from drugs," while they are in Afghanistan. But they look at us as complete squares and pay no attention.

On a lighter note, we brought back some nice cotton from India and are having a local tailor refurbish some attire for summer. Most of the stuff we brought with us from the States is beginning to look pretty sorry. For about $30.00 we are each getting two shirts, two pairs of slacks and two pairs of shorts (only worn in our house or inside the American compound).

Well, that's the Christmas news. Thanks again for all the goodies—I can't tell you how much they meant to us.

Love, your youngest daughter

Part 4—Full Flora and Fauna

May 25, 1972
Dear Mother,

The rains continue. It's official now, the drought is over. Using the rickety hand-made ladder in the shed, we climbed on our roof the other day to see if there was any way we could divert the rainwater away from the especially leaky areas inside. There wasn't, but we did discover that we're growing wheat up there! Guess our roof mud came from a wheat field. If we never get a new roof, we can at least have a harvest.

The rains did in the Hohl's roof, to the extent that they had to move to an apartment. We went over the other day to visit and see how they had fixed it up. It's really cute with many more amenities than the house, but the big drawback is that the minute you step outside the door you are "outside" under Islamic scrutiny. With a yard and compound walls, I have the freedom to walk around (when Dad Ali isn't here) in my shorts or even a swimming suit!

By the time we left their place, it was getting dark, so we had to bike home with the light-generators on. If you want a similar experience put a ten-pound sack of potatoes on the back of that old bike in the basement and bike to Post Falls! When we finally got home (took an hour) and hopped off the bikes, our legs were shaking.

With the warmer weather the bugs have returned and we're now fighting ants and cockroaches. We came home the other night, flipped on the hall light switch, and to our horror saw about ten big fat cockroaches scurrying in the hall. We went on a smashing spree and after a fifteen-minute melee, finally got

the last one nailed. I went to bed with the satisfaction that I might not have won the war, but at least had won a decisive battle. I was bragging on that fact when Chuck came into the bedroom. He gave me the oddest look and then pointed to the wall above my head. I looked up. There, on the wall, about six inches from my head, was the biggest and ugliest cockroach of them all. Chuck (alias cockroach-killer-man) clobbered it with his shoe. We then quickly shut off the light so we wouldn't discover any more and could sleep with the delusion that they were all gone.

We've received an interesting proposition from the Peace Corps psychiatrist. First off, let me say, I have never met a psychiatrist that I thought had all of his marbles and that includes all the various professors from college. This fellow is no exception. He has somehow accumulated four cats and a dog and eventually plans to ship them all back to the States. His service here has just ended and he now needs someone to care for them while he and his family return and resettle. He is estimating that will take about four months and then he will send for them. Meanwhile he's offering us all the money for their food, plus will pay our rent while we keep them. Hmmm. As you know, we're not the greatest of animal lovers, (especially one of us!) but we were thinking it might work if we kept them all outside. It would be a great savings for us and we could use the money for a vacation or for our trip home. I can't even imagine shipping five animals back to the States, but then he's a psychiatrist! We're still thinking it over. We've heard, by the way, that his post won't be re-filled. Good–saves a dollar that could be better spent.

Discovered last week in student discussions that students here had never heard of dinosaurs in the past or of contact lenses in the present. They were incredulous on both accounts. I had to bring a book on dinosaurs from the Peace Corps library to convince them that I wasn't making the whole thing up. Since we've been back from vacation, Chuck and I have started putting a book together called *A Practical Guide to*

American Culture with the idea of trying to prepare the students for situations they will encounter if they go to the U.S. on scholarships. They need to know so much. We don't think our efforts can cover everything, but anything would help. They have no idea of things like escalators, parking meters, bus stations, checking accounts, security deposits—a million things that we just know. We're excited about the project and it will be an additional goal for this year.

Now that we're almost at the end of our first year we've also begun to think about what we'll do when we get back to the States. After some thought Chuck has decided to see about getting a Master's degree in Library Science. Partly, from your suggestion Mom, and the fact that it seems there are plenty of jobs available. Plus, I guess it's a natural extension for people who love to read. Anyway, we're going to start the process of seeing what schools offer a good program and what we need to do to start applying. As for me, I'm not sure. I might want a Masters in Drama or maybe teaching English as a Second Language. Unless we can get scholarships, though, there won't be enough money for both of us to go to school at the same time. Our first priority is to get a program lined up for Chuck and then we'll have to see what I can come up with. I guess it's not very woman's liberating of me to take a back seat here, but I'm not sure what I want to do and from a practical standpoint, it's easier to get one of us situated first.

Dad Ali is gone for a week's vacation to visit his relatives in the provinces, so I've been doing the sweeping and washing and laundry. Nothing like spending the hours it takes to do the simplest thing to really make me appreciate him. Sigh. Do you realize how EASY it is to wash the dishes when you can just run hot water out of the tap?

We're going with some students next week on a picnic and we said we would roast hot-dogs, trying for traditional American picnic food. Can't say they will get a genuine experience since we don't have real hot dogs, or buns, or mustard or cat-

sup. The only REAL picnic item we have are the ever present ants!

That's all the news. Hope spring is bringing you warmer weather and that buttercups are blooming everywhere.

Love, your youngest daughter

P.S. Now that I have so many spices, Chuck had a little spice cabinet made for me. A definite plus for the kitchen. I've got it mounted on the wall next to my kerosene burners and it makes the room quite kitcheny.

June 8, 1972

Dear Mother,

Spring has turned to summer and the days are getting hotter and drier. With all the spring rain though, it's prettier this year; the parks have more grass and the trees seem greener. I wonder if they really are? Or do I now have such an appreciation for greenery that I look for it and focus on it, rather than the brown color of everything else? The parade of bugs through the house continues, and now we have the summer specialty—the scorpion. So far, we've found two—usually rustling under the mats in the living room. Here they're big and black and easy to see. Chuck promptly smashes them with one of his winter boots and sends them to the scorpion here-after.

We're able to keep the house fairly cool by just keeping the doors shut. This house was very cleverly situated so that in the winter the sun comes in full force thought the living room windows and now the rays barely enter the room. We manage quite well without refrigeration. In fact, I now think Americans are a little paranoid about having to keep things in the refrigerator at all times. That may seem like an odd proclamation coming from someone who has diarrhea all the time, but that's from contaminated water, not counter spoilage. Our eggs, for example, are just kept out on the cabinet and they do fine. I also have a method to test them before I crack them open, just in case. You're wondering what that might be? It's easy, just

put each one in a glass of water first. If they float, throw them out! Dad Ali buys fresh cuts of meat daily and just wraps the meat in paper and puts the package in the coolest part of the kitchen. Fruits and vegetables likewise. For cool water we keep a clay jug filled and put it outside. As it "sweats" the water inside is cooled. I suppose the key here is buying everything every day—if I had refrigeration and a few appliances, I guess I wouldn't need Dad Ali. Chuck also surprised me the other day with some outdoor lawn furniture. He had gone to the bazaar and had a simple couch frame made, then had them weave strips of cotton for the seat and the back. It's almost like a real plastic woven patio chair! We can now sit outside in the late afternoons when the house is hot.

When we have time, we're playing tennis at the USAID compound and I'm making some progress. I find I can't play well with Chuck though, he hits the ball better (more often) than I do and gets frustrated with me when I can't return it. We do OK as a doubles couple, but I really prefer to play with women. They filled the swimming pool up last week too, so while it's still a little chilly, we can go and swim any time we like. It's so wonderful going over there—once through the doors and it's "America."

The psychiatrist is getting desperate and has sweetened his deal. He'll now send home a box of whatever we want under his shipment. We're thinking we'll do it, but don't have to let him know for another week. It would be a relief to send some of the things we have purchased and not have to go through the post office ordeal.

We had another volunteer couple staying with us the last few days, the Kurtzes from Lasgahar. They're originally from Montana and we've gotten along well with them but unfortunately they're leaving in a few weeks as life in their post has just been too difficult for them. Makes me SO glad we're in Kabul. Also I continually bless the fact that we're not with the University volunteers. Classes are now canceled once again due to a riot there last week where two students were killed.

I'm not sure who killed them or what they were even rioting about—every week it's something new. Meanwhile, our classes are going full-guns. We have a new class beginning Saturday with forty-two students registered. We have only twenty-one chairs and no books, so first day should be interesting. And it looks like eight students from our Ministry, (including Aref!) will be leaving for England and the States in the fall. We can't really take the credit for this—Aref and the others have been studying English for years, but we've been able to polish their skills and let them hear the language. We're also happy to see Faquor go. He's in his fifties but looks about seventy due to being slightly stooped and having pure white hair. This, he tells us, was the result of being in jail for five years for speaking out against the king. It's probably a miracle that he ever got out. He told us that he was beaten constantly in jail and had poor nutrition and care. Here, they only feed prisoners *non* and water. If you don't have relatives bringing you food and supplies, it's just a matter of time before you die of malnutrition or disease. Makes me laugh to think of the prisoners at home, rioting if they don't have color TV. They should try this place for awhile. Faquor was afraid that this "time" would prevent him from getting abroad, but apparently it hasn't.

There's a big party planned next week for all the volunteers in our cycle for our one-year anniversary. We're definitely a smaller group now, about a third have gone home. We're planning a sort of progressive party, starting at the Jacksons and eating our way across town.

That's about the news. Chuck's finger still looks huge—doctor says will look normal again by August.
Love, your youngest daughter
P.S. Thanks for sending the homemade soup recipes—they work wonderfully!

June 26, 1972
Dear Mother,

We left the States almost a year ago to the day. We sat around last night reflecting on all we've experienced since we've arrived and how we've adapted—to each other and to Afghanistan. I know we're supposed to be here changing the lives of others, but I wonder if our lives aren't the ones that have changed the most. Learning to do without and realizing how happy you can be without "things" will be something I will carry with me forever. And I don't think I would have ever understood the problems and frustrations in third world countries unless I had lived here and come face to face with it on a daily basis.

Chuck remains my best friend and I think Afghanistan has made us even closer as we've cared and helped one another. It seems that couples here either get closer or fall apart. Several of the couples who left our group early did so because they were on the verge of divorce.

For our one-year country anniversary and the lack of anything better to do, we put together an alphabet for Afghanistan, of all the things that we'll never forget. Here goes:

A Afghans, themselves
B Baksheesh (money for bribery that is used in almost every government or legal transaction)
C Charpoy furniture—wonderful, cheap and versatile and the décor of our house!
D Dad Ali!!
E Enshalla—phrase which means "If God Wills It" Practically in front of every sentence.
F. Farouk, our wonderful student
G. Goolam, our servant from training
H. Hazaras, the people of oriental background—the day laborers of Afghanistan.
I. Inoculations—what else!
J. Jewies—the open sewers

K. (so many choices here) Kabul, Kabobs, Kyber Pass, Kuchies (the roaming tribes)
L. Letters—our life blood
M. Moslems, Mosques and Mullahs
N. Non!! A bread never to be equaled!
O. Oxen, a common sight
P. Pilau—the main dish
Q. Qala—meaning Fort and all of them around here.
R. Ramadan!
S. Salaam Alekum (the greeting)
T. Tea—the only hot beverage here
U. University of Kabul—where we're glad we're not!
V. Voice of BBC, our companion on winter nights
W. Woodpile—on which we depend for all warmth
X. Xenophobia—what the uneducated Afghans have!
Y. Yoga—our introduction
Z. Mohammed ZAHIR Shah—the King

As you can see, it's a slow news week. After a year, all the things that used to amaze us, now seem ordinary. In the mornings I bike past camels, Hazaras pulling heavy loads on crude wooden carts, buses with people hanging off of all the sides, women washing their clothes in the river, and deformed beggars on our ministry corner. It all seems normal now and barely worth mentioning.

Oh, we decided for sure to keep the animals, but on the stipulation that they are all kept outside. The good doctor doesn't seem to care as long as they're out of his hands. Now we have to get the stuff together that we want him to ship home. We went down to the carpet bazaar yesterday and bought a small Persian rug. We opted for a new one, not an antique one, especially since we've seen how they're "aged" in the street for days (or weeks) while they are run over by cars, trucks, buses, bicycles, herds of sheep, donkeys, camels and pedestrians. When they reach a certain stage of worn-out, the "antiquers" go out with a long sword, and drag it back and forth across the rug, scraping the pile off. I suppose there are

genuine antique rugs around, they've been making them for centuries, but you'd better know your rugs before you pay more for an "old" one. At any rate, we went to the "new" rug bazaar where we chose one about three feet wide and five feet long, composed of geometric designs in brown, black, deep red and some white. It cost about $40.00. It would be nice to buy a really big one while we're here, but we just don't have the money for that. But we love this one and the $40.00 makes it the most expensive thing we've ever bought as a married couple! Take that back, our old car cost $50.00!! Anyway, we got the rug and we're putting it together with things we got from Pakistan and India and it will all be coming to you eventually. First it will be shipped to the doctor's stateside address, then he will separate our box and mail it to you. Hope you have a good 4th of July—enjoy the town parade and the fireworks.
Love, your youngest daughter

July 4, 1972
Dear Mother,

Today is just an ordinary working day for us. The American Embassy and USAID people all celebrated the 4th on the second, so they could arrange a three-day holiday out of it. They invited volunteers over to the Embassy on Friday and we went over, but the celebrations were a bit boring. It was more fun today talking about the founding of the United States with my advanced students. They were especially keen to learn about all the compromises that the different representatives had to make. Since this country is full of ethnic tribes, they may need this same kind of compromising effort some day. In addition to the Pushtuns and the Hazaras, which I've told you about, there are also the Turkomans and the Uzbeks, who live around Kunduz, north of Kabul. Then there are the Tajiks who live in the northern mountains and the Nuristanis in the northeast. And the Kazaks (I don't know where they live) and the Kuchies who roam all over the place.

The biggest crime in this country is petty theft and we are now part of the "been had" category. We took the bus the other day, got off and Chuck realized his wallet was gone. He had a few choice words to say about Afghans, but mostly was mad at himself. The pickpocket racket is like a game—who is going to outfox whom. A few months ago, again on the bus, he actually caught an Afghan with his hand in his pocket! Towering over the guy, he bopped him on the top of his head with his fist and said "No!" The Afghan merely looked up and grinned sheepishly, realizing that he had been caught. Chuck doesn't usually carry a wallet and when he does he's usually got his hand on it, but this time….

The good news is that it had very little money, only his P.C. I.D. card (which is easily replaced) and an Idaho driver's license. We'll write the drivers license bureau and see if we can't get another one. From now on he's only going to carry it in his front pocket or just use the little leather pouches we often wear around our necks under our shirts. Two days after that, on the very day we went to buy a new wallet, we stopped at the Peace Corps office to get mail and put our bikes inside the building under the stairwell, with all the other P.C. bikes. The Peace Corps offices are on the second floor, so all volunteers just come in through the door, leave their bikes back under the stairs in the racks and go upstairs. We came downstairs all ready to grab our bikes and his was gone! It had been the last one leaning on the pile and someone had obviously slipped in and taken it. Again, we should have locked them both, but we've all got into the habit of just leaving them inside the door, thinking that being in the P.C. office made them safe. Ha!

You asked how my petunias were doing and I'm sorry to report they were all eaten. However, some of my flowers have survived and I now have sunny little marigolds peeking out among big waving purple and pink cosmos flowers. It's the first thing we see when we enter through our small door in the compound wall. It makes me smile every time! We have an outside faucet and hose, so it's been easy to give the plants a

little extra water, although for most of the time, we've had enough rain. We're amazed at the contrast between this summer and last—not only with the weather, but with our life styles. Last summer at this time we were sick almost continually, were living in a dusty, drab and hot house, were struggling just to say the simplest things in Farsi, and had few friends outside of our training class. This year we have our comfortable little house, many Afghan and American friends, can converse well in Farsi and are only down with diarrhea every OTHER day!
Love, your youngest daughter

July 15, 1972
Dear Mother,

Yesterday was my twenty-third birthday and it will go down as the Bedlam Birthday! It started off calmly enough. We got up to our regular hot tea and *non* and I opened envelopes from all of you that I had been saving from the mail. I got great cards and letters from both Rita and Linda and Rita even sent me a couple of pairs of new undies (always appreciated and no one even stole them out of the envelope!) Thanks for your cute card and long newsy letter.

The chaos started at noon with the arrival of the doctor *and* his family *and* his two servants *and* the ANIMALS. When we went out to open the gate we thought it would just be him and the animals. But no, it's the whole tribe! And that wouldn't have been so bad, but when we invited them in, his kids just ran amuck, going everywhere, pulling open drawers, running around, going through our school papers and books and making me very nervous that they would break or somehow ruin the few things that we have. Then in come the servants carrying these animal cages, and one box. The five cages held the four cats and the dog and the box (!) held another cat (# 5) and three kittens!

I'm trying to take this all in and wonder if the deal is off as we agreed to four cats, not EIGHT, while I'm suddenly seeing pieces of my clothing that his kids have brought out of our bedroom and are now parading through the living room. Meanwhile Chuck is trying to keep all of this straight, get the money from this looney bin and get them out of the house. Right at that time we get another knock at the gate and it's a Peace Corps friend who has stopped by so we could meet his visiting brother. "Come on in," Chuck said, "and ignore the confusion." So now we have eight cats, one dog, four wild children, and seven adults all competing for our attention. Art, the volunteer, made a quick retreat and it wasn't too much later that the good doctor left as well. And like a movie script, they roared away in their car and actually forgot one of their kids! It was a little one, only about two, who had been behind a door somewhere. They rushed back in, grabbed her and took off again. I think the whole thing was a rehearsed plot to keep us off balance about the extra cat and kittens. He did also leave us a one hundred-dollar bill, which will cover their expenses and ours for several months, so we hope it will be worth it. Mike Osmera (our PC neighbor) came over and helped us put the cages back in the wood shed and take stock of the herd: one long-haired gray Persian cat, one black cat, two mixed orange and white cats and the mother cat which is black and white. The kittens are all black and white fuzz balls. The dog is a little shorthaired mixed breed of some kind with golden fur and a little wagging tail. His name is Augie and I've taken to calling him Augie-doggie. All them, with the exception of the mother cat and babies have been put outside. There are plenty of warm piles of sawdust they can sleep in out in the woodshed and it's not cold now anyway. We've decided to let the mom-cat stay indoors in the box until the babies are getting around better, then out they go, too. Since there's no such thing as cat or dog food they will be fed bazaar hamburger (pretty bad) mixed with *non* and any leftovers we have. The cost to send these animals to America, by the way, is over $200.00 per animal, so

excluding the kittens, that's $1200.00 and that doesn't count the time they have to remain in quarantine! That guy is nuts!

There was still enough of the day left to go over to the USAID compound and take out our stress on a few tennis balls. After that we came home, fired up the stove for an early shower, then went out for my birthday dinner at the Gulzar—even had a bottle of wine that we had been saving. After dinner we had the taxi take us to the Aylwards as they had wanted to treat me to a birthday drink, then they took us home. When we were finally home, Chuck presented me with his gift, a badminton set, that he had managed to find in the bazaar, so now we can play a little in our yard, or take it over to the USAID compound. It was a good birthday, just a little hectic in the middle!

I actually went to something without Chuck the other day. This almost never happens since we're always going to the same place and it's safer to be together. But, I was invited to an Embassy baby shower for Mary Jane Stewart, the wife of one of the P.A.S. team members at the Ministry. It was quite the affair. They picked me up in a car and carted me off to this fancy embassy house where we were treated to little cakes, cookies and champagne! For her gift, I had drawn two pictures of Dr. Suess Cat-in-the-Hat (one happy and one sad) and had them framed in the bazaar. They looked quite nice and she really seemed to like them. Being at such a function, though, makes me feel self conscious since my clothes aren't really up to snuff (not in their league anyway) and it's hard for me to relate to their conversations of babies and children. They were all very nice, of course, but after a few hours I was anxious to get back to Chuck in our little house.

Our Peace Corps supervisor told us last week that we may have to go home two months early or two months late, due to some problem with the timing of our replacements. We voted for two months early! That would put us out of here the first of May instead of the first of July and would give us all summer to get home and get established, wherever that turns out to be.

It's not a done deal, but we're excited about it anyway. As well as things are going, we're still anxious to come home.
Love, your youngest daughter

P.S. Results of our annual physicals came back and we remain free of any *major* (life-threatening) diseases!

July 23, 1972
Dear Mother,

Buried deep in the main bazaar, at the end of a narrow alley, is the most amazing store in all of Kabul. We call it the money bazaar. It's a tiny shack, with only room for an old desk, a couple of chairs and some dilapidated cabinets. There is always a crowd of men standing around and it's difficult to work your way through to the front, but once you do, you see two Afghans, wedged in behind one desk, spinning abacus beads in a blur. Drawers are half-open and money is falling out on the dirt floor, papers are blowing around in total disorganization and the cabinet doors are hanging open, so stuffed with bills and folders they can't be closed. Rupies, Afghanis, Dollars, Marcs, every color of money is going back and forth across their battered desk and getting jammed together in the middle open drawer. Somehow they have a system, but only they know what it is. And what's even more amazing, they will actually *cash* a check written on a bank in the United States! Here is a country that virtually has no checking and no credit cards and it would be either impossible or a bureaucratic nightmare to get a U.S. check cashed in a regular bank. But down in this unlikely, dirty, hole-in-the-wall financial market, it's a snap. Just sign the back and they hand over the money, according to the daily rate of exchange. I don't know if they just have learned that most Americans have good deposits in the States or what, but they don't even raise an eyebrow. Or, perhaps they have a way of coming back for you, should the check be bad? A few weeks ago, when we bought our little carpet, the rug

dealer said we could take it home and try it out if we wished and bring it back if we didn't like it. He didn't want our names or a deposit or anything. Could it be that we stick out so much it would be easy work to find us, even in this city of a half a million? Or maybe, they just assume we will be honest? Who knows? But to get back to the checking, I took the birthday check you sent me (thank you very much) and cashed it without a problem. The proceeds will now be re-circulated at the tailor's where new clothes await!

We went to a party the other day at the Peace Corps center to welcome ninety new volunteers, now replacing the volunteers a year ahead of us. They all seemed so naïve and so–what can I say? Ignorant! Were we really that awe-struck and goofy a year ago?

We finished the first draft of our *American Culture Guide* and gave it to various volunteers for their comments and suggestions. Good grief—we can't believe all the controversy! Everyone has a different opinion on everything. I had written, for example, that it was customary in the United States for women to shave their legs and under their arms. One volunteer indignantly told me this was "regional." What do I know, I'm from Idaho, right? (Afghan women, by the way, don't shave arms or legs, but do have the painful process of PLUCKING OUT all of their pubic hair, as they think it's more sanitary that way!) In another section we talked about the bus system, mentioning Greyhound buses and we got all kinds of flack for not mentioning Trailways. My rebuttal was that Greyhound goes everywhere and Trailways doesn't. I'd never even heard of it! There were countless items like this, so in the rewrite we're putting in all sorts of qualifiers, like "we think," "in our opinion," "in some areas of the United States," etc. etc. Plus, we're adding a disclaimer in the front saying this is the *opinion* of two recent college graduates and is not meant to represent all views of American culture.

I've decided I'm more of a dog person than a cat person. Augie-doggie is now waiting for us just inside the gate every

day when we get home from classes. He wags his tail and gets so excited he runs in circles and hops up and down. He also earns his keep as a watchdog by barking anytime anyone approaches the outside wall. He knows the difference between Afghans and Americans. If we open the door to another volunteer, he stops barking immediately. If it's an Afghan he just keeps yapping until we tell him to stop. I don't know where this behavior comes from—maybe the Dr. taught him this or he senses a difference? Most Afghans are afraid of dogs, so this works as a good crime deterrent. I doubt if any Afghan would ever break in here, (what is there to steal?) but now we have double protection—the lock and the dog. Meanwhile, the cats just meander around and wait for the next meal. Dad Ali makes up a concoction of *non* and ground beef and dishes it out every morning. Since *he* doesn't eat meat every day, I asked him if it bothered him that the animals do. He merely shrugged and said, "the animals are rich; I'm not."

I think I married a closet athlete. In our first year of marriage, I've discovered that this liberal arts, guitar-playing husband of mine also loves sports and is very good at them. In just two months he's become exceptional at tennis and actually won a doubles tournament with Ralph Hephner, another volunteer, this past weekend. He had never played more than once or twice in his life, but he just takes to the game and loves competition. He had wanted me to sign up for the tournament as well, but I want to get better first. Not being a natural athlete, it's taking me longer than two months to perfect my game or even *have* a game! And speaking of sports, I don't think I mentioned that the baseball season ended with the PC /Afghan team finishing in the middle. That's a big improvement from the "dead last" position of their football team.

Hope the summer continues well for you and that you can make your trip down to see Rita. Thanks again for the letters, cards and the birthday check. Be sure to check the back of it when it comes back one of these days—would love to see what bank cleared it!

Love, your youngest daughter

P.S. As summer progresses, it's getting hotter and we find ourselves making excuses not to bike all the way over to the Peace Corps office every week. So, my letters will be bi-weekly at best. It's so much more fun to bike home, relax outside in the shade on our lawn couch, and sip on Christmas Kool-Aid.

August 10, 1972
Dear Mother,

Originally, I thought we would carry a lunch to work every day, but over time we've found it's just as cheap and much easier to eat at the old hotel across the street from the Ministry. It's a wonderful old place, quite elegant, with linen table clothes and napkins and we can get a hot lunch of rice, soup and a meat or vegetable sauce for about forty-five cents. They have some scrumptious yogurt based soups, various *pilaus* with good selections of sauces, and of course, *non* and hot tea.

Making a traditional sandwich just doesn't work here. For starters there is no roast beef, ham, turkey, peanut butter, cheese, tuna, sliced bread, lettuce, pickles, mustard or mayonnaise. And to use tomatoes, you have to wash them, soak them in iodine for a half an hour and then peel them. And even if you could come up with substitutes, there's nothing to wrap the sandwich in, besides left over newspapers. Eating a traditional lunch of *pilau* in a clean restaurant is much better! Once in a while we'll go to a kabob stand, which just offer skewers of freshly roasted mutton with *non* and hot tea. These little outdoor shops have two problems though, one is flies and the other is clean water. The flies we counter by sacrificing a few pieces of our kabob at the far end of our table and fanning our area continually. That gives us a little peace. The water for the tea is boiled, so Peace Corps taught us to pour a little of it over one spot in our cup to sanitize it for drinking, remember where the spot is and only put your lips on that exact location. The

floors are just dirt, so it's not a problem to pour water out on the floor.

In our correspondence to find a graduate school for Chuck, it looks like the University of Oregon will be the best or at least the cheapest. The University of Washington was $525.00 per quarter and Oregon is only $225.00 per semester. Chuck is signed up to take his graduate record exam at the USIS facility in October and will also take a language test *in Farsi to use as his language requirement. Between the Farsi lessons and sample test for the graduate record exams, he's busy most evenings* with his nose in a book.

We had a death last week, a nineteen-year-old daughter of Peace Corps staff. We didn't know her but saw her often as she worked as a lifeguard at the USAID pool. She came down with a cold last week, which suddenly turned into pneumonia. They flew her to the hospital in Beirut, which is reputed to be excellent, but in five days she was gone. It doesn't seem possible that a young girl who was the picture of good health could die so suddenly. They said she had contacted an E-coli virus (same one that causes strep throat) and that it had nothing to do with being in Afghanistan; it could have happened anywhere. The family was devastated, of course, and has returned to the States.

Other Peace Corps news includes partner swapping! Apparently the volunteers over in Shari Nau had all been living together in some kind of communal arrangement. Last week one of the wives told her husband she was divorcing him, marrying one of the communal roommates and they were leaving for New York within the week. That was a bombshell! I'm pretty sure we'll see that type of living arrangement forbidden in the future. I can't imagine it anyway. Just living with one other couple for three months was hard enough for me.

We managed to get our hands on a film (and a projector) about America that we showed to our students this past week. It had scenes of freeways, national parks, amusement parks, bridges, skyscrapers and country scenes. The students were

absolutely spellbound—couldn't believe their eyes. It also had water-skiing and ice-skating, showing women with bare legs! They had never even heard of the sports, much less seen a woman doing them. We probably would have gotten in big trouble if the ministry officials had known that part was in the film, but our students were delighted and weren't about to tell on us! If they're leaving Afghanistan, they might as well get used to the idea of women in bathing suits.

My favorite time of day is now the late afternoon and early evening. The temperature eases off and the skies take on that bluest of blue—liquid topaz, against the honey brown hills. The beauty always takes me by surprise.
Love, your youngest daughter

August 26, 1972
Dear Mother,

I was on the toilet the other day (how's that for a beginning—reminds me of the *New Yorker* magazine bits "Letters you don't want to finish") when I thought I heard something overhead and casually looked up. Directly above me on the ceiling was this enormous black scorpion, about five inches long. I meekly called out to Chuck, fearing that any second this thing would just drop down on me. Chuck could tell by the sound of my voice that all was not well, so he came in at a gallop and I simply pointed upwards. He then ran back for one of his shoes (our best weapons against things that crawl) while I slowly crept off of the toilet. We dragged in a chair and with some anxiety, Chuck climbed up and clobbered it. The hard part is making sure you do it at an angle, so the beast doesn't fall on you. It did fall to the ground and *was* still alive so Chuck proceeded to beat it to smithereens.

Hard to believe it's almost September and all things of fall are approaching. First, Linda, have a very happy birthday and I do hope your new teaching year goes well. And Mom, same for you. Summer seems to have passed so quickly. Wasn't it

just a letter ago when you told me school was out for the summer? Fall also brings football and the old Peace Corps-Afghan-football-baseball team is assembled once again. This year they are feeling confident. Too bad there isn't a soccer season, we would have the upper hand! (or should I say upper foot?)

One of the Afghans who works with the P.A.S. team in the ministry has an American wife named Maureen. This past July they had their first baby and I saw her for the first time yesterday. I asked her how it was, being a new mom, and she looked at me blankly, then said, "the baby died." I felt terrible and stammered out my apologies and sympathies. Then, walking away, I felt angry that no one had bothered to clue me in. I still don't know what it died of, could be anything around here. Since infant mortality is so high, from now on I'll try to check up on the situation before hand. Dad Ali's baby, by the way, survived his first year and has now been named Babur.

I must say, while I'm thinking of Maureen, that I am against these mixed Afghan/American marriages. Every one I've seen is not working. One wife, named Janice, hung around the Peace Corps office when we were training and her story is fairly typical. She told me she met her husband at her university and was attracted to his strong, dark, looks, his enthusiasm about America and his adoration of her. Like most Afghan men, he loved her pale skin and light hair. (Every American wife I've met is equally pale.) Anyway, they married and returned to Afghanistan. At first all was fine and exciting, but as the years progressed, her husband returned to be more and more Afghan and less and less American. Their social outings were confined to just dinners with the in-laws where all conversations were in Farsi. He began to dislike having her walk with him outside and preferred she stay at home while he did whatever needed doing in the bazaars. Since she hadn't been able to get pregnant, she had nothing to do at home and nothing in common with her sisters-in-laws. And not only did she have this isolation, but had lost everything "American." For

her, there was no Fourth of July, or Easter, or Halloween or Christmas or Valentines. And of course no music, no films, no TV and very little news. Everything that had been her life had vanished. When we met her she was pretty miserable and was thinking of returning to the States. Of course, this was going to take HIS permission, since Afghan women don't even get passports. She still had an American passport but needed his signature on an *exit* visa. You actually need permission to get out of here! I don't know what has become of her. Since there were no children, maybe he would agree to a divorce, which they say is accomplished by his proclaiming "I divorce you" three times. How can you explain to anyone how intrinsic their culture is and how it will be missed?

We have student teachers again at the ministry which gives us a little free time. It came in handy last week when we were both down with bouts of Salmonella and spent the better part of two days running from the bed to the bathroom. I'm still not feeling one hundred percent, seem to get cramps and nausea every afternoon. Think I'll be dropping off some "samples."
Love, your youngest daughter

September 10, 1972
Dear Mother,

If the Romans are famous for their roads, and the Egyptians are famous for their pyramids, then the Afghans should be famous for their irrigation. It was something we noticed when we first flew in here—strange round mounds, dotting across the desert in a line, ending in a patch of green. These are called *karez*. To be fair, they aren't really exclusive to Afghanistan; they exist all across the old empire of Persia, dating back some twenty-five hundred years. They are a clever system of wells and tunnels that bring water from the springs in the mountains to the middle of the desert. They are a string of wells actually, each one about sixty feet apart, all connected underground to the same water source at the mountain. They advance far into

the desert, with as many as two hundred wells along the line. Around each well is a huge mound of dirt, which is what you can see from the air. Not being an engineer, I can't describe it as *well* (excuse the pun) as I should, but I have an interesting book about them that I'll bring home. All I really know is that they are bringing water from a great distance without the use of pipes.

I was thinking of the *karez* when we went to the post office the other day to mail your Christmas boxes. How can a people clever enough to come up with desert irrigation not be able to run an efficient postal system? This year Nik Mohammed went with us and it went smoother and faster than last year. I had left the box ends open for inspection but our inspector this year wasn't interested. He wrapped them up with wire and put some nifty looking wire seals on them, stamped the stamps and we were done. The only mystery was that we didn't have to pay the entire amount that the stamps indicated. We weren't about to argue and demand to pay more, so we just hustled out of there and took Nik Mohammed to lunch.

Ack! My latest lab results came back and said I have an intestinal worm. Not the giant one from fish, but one of its cousins. Dr. Johnson gave me fourteen huge pills. I'm to take seven today and seven tomorrow and then supposedly all will be resolved. Hope so as the whole affair is decidedly creepy. Other health notes include new glasses for me. I got an eye check up at the international eye clinic here and Peace Corps has ordered new glasses for me. I needed just a little bit stronger prescription.

We had a very fun birthday for Chuck on the third—his last in Afghanistan! I had a big flannel bathrobe made for him at the tailor's, something to keep him warm in the cold nights ahead and we had dinner at our favorite German restaurant, The Gulzar. He also had a special day in that his football team won and he caught a pass for a touchdown. It doesn't get much better than that!

We were supposed to have heard from the psychiatrist by now on when he wants to ship the animals, but we haven't heard a word. His contact here, Larry Beck, who continues to pay for the food, hasn't either. I do hope he has come to his senses and has decided against it. We would then give the cats away (maybe keep one to keep the mice down) and keep Augie.

The weather is cooling off now and our thoughts are turning to getting our wood and sawdust supply and getting new plastic for the window insulation. We may be able to salvage some of the pieces from last year, but much of it ripped when we took it down in the spring. Thinking of the project depresses me a little, maybe because I know another long winter is ahead and coming home is still a long ways away. I'm suddenly nostalgic for fall things I remember from home—leaves turning color, pumpkins, and that special feeling in the air that makes you realize summer is over. I really wish I could walk along a sidewalk and kick leaves and *not* be noticed by anyone.

Love, your youngest daughter

September 29, 1972
Dear Mother,

We're getting a complete new roof! The landlord had been planning to re-mud the roof before winter, but when he came over to inspect it, he decided the old beams wouldn't support the new weight. They had been sagging more and more, making a bowed ceiling that was about ten inches lower in the middle than it was on the sides. While he's at it he's going to repaint the dining and living rooms. So, we will have a very fresh and non-leaking house for winter. This project is going to take about five days and will be an unlivable mess, but as it happens we have been asked to house sit for the weekend, so we can be out of here for the worst of it and just leave Dad Ali in charge.

Our latest student teachers have graduated so we're back full time with our students once again. They were so excited to see us and it was such fun to catch up on their stories. They are way too polite to ever comment on the student teachers, if they liked them or not, but it does make us feel good that they are happy to see us return. We have been putting in some extra time with the students who are headed to the States as we worry about their culture shock. Even with all our discussions and our book, they will undoubtedly have a difficult time figuring things out. We will continue to try to prepare them for everything but it's just impossible to foresee all the difficulties they will have. I pray that there is some kind of organization or Afghan group that can help them on the other end.

We didn't get out of town this year for the Jesum (Independence Day) celebration, just biked over to the USAID compound for the day, then biked back home. I had been wondering what the "independence" part was all about since no one has ever really conquered this country, so Aref gave me this capsule history:

Afghanistan has always been a crossroads from West to East, going all the way back to Marco Polo and Alexander the Great. Once the British were controlling India, they wanted to have a foothold in Afghanistan to keep the Russian Tsar from moving in, so in 1839 they made their way through the Kyber Pass and installed a puppet king in Kabul. This arrangement lasted only three years when the entire garrison of some four thousand, five hundred British and Indian soldiers were forced out and ambushed outside of the city. In 1878 they returned and again met with failure. In 1919 after another skirmish, Britain decided to back off and declared Afghanistan's independence. Although the last fight was small in comparison to the 1839 fiásco, that was the date chosen for Independence.

The Afghans remain pleased (if not arrogant) about defeating Britain, but I can't help but think they would have been better off under their control—at least for fifty years or so. They might have gotten some schools, hospitals, roads and a

postal system out of the deal! Meanwhile, we're now in the middle of Ramadan, alias the grumpy month, and we will try to avoid the bazaars when we can until the foolishness is over!

As well as things are going, we still find ourselves anxious to come home and are now counting down the months to departure, which assuming it is the last day of April, only leaves SEVEN months. And two weeks of that will be spent in India. I find myself with less patience, especially when I'm hassled on the street. Yesterday, for example, I was biking along when a kid shouted *jhoragee* at me and threw a small rock. *Jhoragee,* as I've told you before, literally translates as foreigner but the connotation is more like *infidel,* or for a woman, just plain *whore*. Normally, I would just keep going, but for some reason it just sent me into a rage. I stopped, turned around on my bike and started after the kid. I had planned to grab him and shake him, but of course, he was quicker and got away. He was probably delighted with himself that he got such a rise out of me. Our students have told us time and time again that it's just due to their illiteracy, and to pay them no attention, but some days you just snap.

One of the problems is the bike riding itself. Afghan women are *never* on a bike. Putting aside the problem of having enough money to buy one, the old custom was that young girls should never do anything too physical for fear of breaking the hymen early. The bed sheets of newlyweds used to be inspected after the wedding night and if there wasn't a blood spot, the bride was tossed out or their family got their dowry back or some such thing. I was told that this doesn't happen anymore, but I wouldn't bet on it. At any rate, girls are not taught to ride a bike, which restricts them and makes it just that much more difficult to leave the house. After they are grown, even if they had encouragement, which they don't, they are too scared to try. Anyway, all of this means that for many, a woman riding a bicycle is automatically a whore. It's easy to discuss all of this rationally, here in a letter, but I can't tell you how angry and frustrated it makes me. As our friend Mike

Aylward said, "intellectual understanding, emotional non acceptance."

We spend countless hours thinking of our trip home and how we want to get there. Peace Corps gives you a plane ticket home or the cash equivalent and you can design your own way back. Of course, that's what everyone does. Our only definite idea at present is to spend some time in Greece. When we tire of that subject, we fantasize on what we would like to eat once back in the States. Tying for first place are steaks, tacos, store-bought hamburgers, and ice cream. Second place is everything else.

I know my letters are getting further apart and I don't want you to worry. It's just that sometimes there's not a lot to write about and it's also tedious to bike all the way to the Peace Corps office. Remember I love you and really, really, really miss you.

Love, your youngest daughter

P.S. Just got a letter from Rita with the news of their Navy transfer to Guam. I'm excited for them but at the same time I know you can't be too happy seeing another daughter so far away. Don't worry—we'll be home before you know it!

Part 5–The Second Seasons

October 19, 1972
Dear Mother,

"I thought you didn't get tackled in flag football," I told Chuck when he and Mike Osmera came limping through the door last Friday. Mike had collided with someone and his glasses had made a nasty cut above his eye—fourteen stitches worth, administered by our good Dr. Johnson. Chuck was complaining of very sore ribs and could hardly take a breath without it hurting. The Dr. told him he had probably cracked one or two ribs but there wasn't much to do about it except to take an aspirin and try not to bang them any more. We were house-sitting at the Stewart's house, so we invited Mike to spend the night. There was plenty of room and we were sure the Stewarts wouldn't have minded. Poor Mike. His one eye was completely swollen shut and the other one was just a slit. Of course we got a big laugh when he took their copy of *Playboy* to his room, "to read an article," he said.

Our new ceiling is gorgeous and flat. We hadn't realized just how curved the other one was until we came in and saw what a flat ceiling looked like. We have about two feet of mud up top so we should be insulated and waterproofed for the winter. While the roof is mud, the ceiling is wood and ours is painted white with decorative touches in the middle and molding all around the walls–probably the last wooden ceiling and the prettiest one I'll ever have. New paint smells great too—makes me want to go out and buy new cushions, but we'll make do with what we have. We could use a new mattress. Our original "beach ball" has now smashed down to about two

inches. Every time I roll over my hipbones inform me that I'm sleeping on wooden boards. I try to put myself in a yoga frame of mind and not move once I'm in my sleeping position.

Other home projects included buying all new plastic to cover the windows. We decided it would be too much work to try and patch the old brittle pieces together so we gave them all to Dad Ali, who took them gladly. With his help we got all the new plastic tacked up last week and this week we have the wood and sawdust coming in. Hard to believe that next winter I won't be worrying about such things. I might be worrying about money though. I got Linda's latest letter and was horrified to learn that they are renting a half a duplex for $160.00 a month. WOW. Have prices gone up or what?

We were sorry to learn of the death of another tourist here in Afghanistan. You may have read about it. Two American brothers were walking with a mule around the world and were ambushed somewhere in Afghanistan. One brother was killed, the other wounded. They had been traveling for over sixteen months without an incident. I suppose one could say it could happen anywhere, but the odds really are greater here. There are just too many bandits and religious zealots roaming the hills. In fact, I never told you before, but the volunteers we replaced were ambushed coming back to Kabul from somewhere. I heard that they were traveling at dusk (never a good idea) and were robbed and she was raped. They did catch the perpetrators though and Farouk told us they wouldn't last long in prison as rape is considered to be the worst crime possible. (That's probably not much consolation for them!) I would still like to see the Blue Mosque at Maz-i-Sharif and the Great Mosque in Heart, near the Iranian border, but Chuck is reluctant to do much more traveling around the country. The longer we're here the more protective he becomes.

I borrowed another volunteer's hand-crank sewing machine and have made myself a new flannel nightgown. I found a nightgown pattern at the Peace Corps library and bought a couple of yards of flannel down in the bazaar. It took me for-

ever, between the machine breaking down, and me working at a snail's pace. Our light isn't good enough to see what you' re doing at night, so I was confined to working on it just an hour or two in the afternoon. It's done now though and I'm quite proud of myself AND I plan to be plenty warm this winter!

We finally got a note from the good psychiatrist, but it didn't tell us much–only that he hadn't forgotten us. He also *casually* mentioned he hadn't found work, so I'm thinking he's beginning to abandon the plan of shipping the animals. That would cost more than a thousand dollars—a little steep for an unemployed person with four children. The other problem is that Larry, who was going to do all the technical aspects of crating and clearing the animals through customs, is due to leave the country in November. There is no way we can buy the plane tickets for the animals, so without him, this deal doesn't fly. That reminds me, you should be hearing from him about now, regarding the trunk we sent home with him. Have you?

Chuck takes his Graduate Record Exam next week and will take his language proficiency test in November. He's studied almost every night and feels confident. Right after that is a four-day holiday to celebrate the end of Ramadan (HOORAY) and the Aylwards invited us to go with them again to Peshawer. We thought we would. It will be nice to get away for a couple of days.

I'm so glad you got the film I sent home with the volunteer. Thanks for developing it—I'll pay you back when we get home. Now you can "see" some of the things I talk about.
Miss you and wish I was there to look at the pictures over your shoulder.
Love, your youngest daughter

November 14, 1972
Dear Mother,

I read where Nixon won the election. "By a landslide," it said. It's surprising to me since all we hear are criticisms, but then we listen to the British Broadcasting System not the V.O.A. (Voice of America.) Almost everyone is very critical of our war in Vietnam and I couldn't agree more. Many Afghans have told us that they like the American people but they don't like the American government. While we do have a government "of the people" this war certainly isn't "of the people," "by the people," and it sure as heck isn't "for the people." Maybe the damn thing will be over soon!

We had a very restful time in Peshawer. This time we didn't buy much except for a big world map for our classroom and we each got a new pair of shoes. Mine are a little wide, but if I wear them with double socks, I can get by. I'm only using them as romp around shoes, so they don't have to fit perfectly. I took the map to school and it took three of my new English students over five minutes to find Afghanistan. These students have only completed high school and they hadn't seen a world map before, only maps of Afghanistan. They were searching all over the place trying to find Afghanistan's shape! How pathetic is that?! But, better late than never and it makes a great geography English lesson as there are so many easy questions like "where is…" or "how many rivers are there in…." etc.

Mike, our neighbor, just finished his third year and has now left for the States. We will miss him so much—he was a great guy. I hope I can keep in touch with some of these people. A few days after he left a couple of W.T.'s (guys) came by and wanted to rent the house. They heard we lived next door so came knocking at our door to find out where the landlord lived. We told them, and also told them about spinal tuberculoses, typhoid, dysentery, no medical care, tourist-murders and every negative thing we could think of. They don't speak a word of Farsi or know anything about the culture—just a disaster waiting to happen. I guess they just want to hole up and smoke dope. One of them told us he wanted to stay here several

months because there was so much to do! Unless they like to read, I think they've got the wrong country.

We're planning a big Thanksgiving Day at the Jackson's this year with as many volunteers as we can round up. Rumor has it there will even be a turkey! I think this year I'll make yogurt pie. It's another fail-proof recipe (and very good) that I can get all the ingredients for and doesn't require exact oven temperatures. By the time this letter reaches you the holiday will already have come and gone so I hope everyone had a great feast and made a terrific mess in the kitchen. It's so easy to wash dishes in the States—it would practically be fun! (Am I setting myself up or what?!)
Love, your youngest daughter

December 5, 1972
Dear Mother,

Our living room is crisscrossed with lines of dripping laundry. Since the sun is our only dryer, we try not to do the laundry on rainy days. Usually Dad Ali can put it off until the sun peeks through, but we've had a combination of rain and snow now for over a week, so were running out of clothes. It takes them *forever* to dry inside! It's definitely winter now, we light our fires and sit huddled up by the stove every night. In fact, I'm the designated fire-tender tonight, so it seems every ten minutes I'm getting up and adding another chunk of wood. Wood fires burn way too fast, but they are much hotter and cozier than our slow-burning sawdust stove in the hall. We stopped biking to work (too cold) and usually take a taxi in the mornings and catch a ride home in the PSA truck in the afternoon. It costs about thirty cents to take a cab, and only about three cents to take the bus, but we saved a bunch of money between our house-sitting and keeping the animals, so we're splurging.

Speaking of the animals, they are on their way out. Larry, the doctor's friend who was paying us, left the country and told

us to give them away. We're going to keep Augie-doggie though, as we've really come to like him and appreciate him for being such a good watchdog. Dad Ali likes him too. When it was warmer we would sometimes come home to find them both sitting together on the porch, Augie with his head on Dad Ali's lap. Several of our students have expressed an interest in the cats, so they will be going to good homes and not just wandering around in the street.

We had a wonderful Thanksgiving over at the Jackson's house this year. Tons of scrumptious food and we all stuffed ourselves as per tradition. The main topic of conversation was the future. Everybody now has "going home" on the brain. Lots of talk about how to travel home, whether to go through Europe or Asia and what we are all going to do when we get back. We couldn't help but think that this time next year we would all be back in the States with our families. How strange! And doubly weird is that having Thanksgiving in the States now seems stranger than having it here!

I wrote Linda and Don a letter and told them they should join the Peace Corps when Don finishes his Masters in forestry. I'm sure that with Rita and Pat going to Guam and us over here, you really don't need your third daughter on another continent. But, we'll be home SOON and look at all the benefits they could get: a great experience for future job hunting, a chance to do something really different before being weighed down with children, a chance to do something good, the opportunity to learn a new language and travel places you would never normally go, two years to meet wonderful people and make lasting friends, and most importantly, the satisfaction of living life to the fullest, of grabbing all the brass rings and not thinking at eighty-five that they missed out on opportunities. So, if they decide to go, it's all my fault!

It looks like Christmas this year will be on Christmas! Rita's package has already arrived and other volunteers have begun to get their boxes from home. It helps matters when there are no dock strikes and the border between India and

Pakistan is open. Speaking of which, we're planning a two-week overland trip to India in January. Originally, we were going to go all the way down to Sri Lanka, but we've now decided to cut back. It saves money and there is plenty to see in northern India–the Taj, as an example. We can save money by taking the train and think it will be fun.

Under the topic of miscellaneous news I can say that football season finally ended last month and Chuck's somewhat battered team ended up in fourth place! Chuck's ribs are still sore. The doctor said they would be fine in another month. Of course the ring finger was supposed to be fine by now, but it looks like it will never be the size it was. We're going to take the ring to Delhi and see about getting it welded back together.

On the medical front we have to go in tomorrow and get more shots—cholera and gamma gobulin for sure and I think a TB test. One thing for sure, Peace Corps has cured me of my shot phobia. I don't feel queasy and I never pass out any more. I guess my subconscious finally figured out that they don't really hurt that much and it "was all in my head!" Maybe that's how to get rid of all phobias, just do the thing you fear over and over again, until one day, you realize you're just not afraid of it anymore.

Our classrooms are freezing. The Ministry hasn't flipped the heating switch yet and since we have missing windowpanes, the temperature is decidedly brisk. There is no front door to the Ministry, they just hang a huge woolen blanket over the entrance and one of the soldiers pulls it aside when someone comes through. Afghan soldiers, by the way, are a sight for sore eyes. They are basically conscripted to serve unless they can *baksheesh* their way out of it. They get paid almost nothing and live in the most deplorable conditions. Their uniforms are these shapeless gray wool things that look like they've been passed down for generations. There are some cots in the back hallways in the Ministry and it is common to see two soldiers snuggled up together in one of the cots. While such a display between a man and a woman would practically get you shot,

homosexual displays are commonplace and no one seems to think a thing about them. Go figure!

The "black" of my "blackboard" has slowly been flaking off and students have a hard time seeing chalk against plain wood, but then I'm almost out of chalk, so pretty soon it won't make any difference. We think we'll send the boards out to be re-painted while we're on vacation and I'm going to scour the bazaar and find my own chalk.

That's the news from Kabul.

Love, your youngest daughter

December 15, 1972

Dear Mother,

We put up our tree today and it's looking grand. It was easier to come by this year as a Muslim merchant got wise to the fact that the infidels like trees for Christmas. He set up a little Christmas tree stand in the bazaar and did a brisk business. Three hundred Afghanis for a fresh pine—what a deal! We covered it with glittered blown-out eggs and tin-foil chains (carefully saved from last year) and made new paper snowmen, camel cut-outs and paper stars. We tied strings on little candies and hung them up and put string loops between Christmas seals, licked them together and hung those as well. We taped Dad Ali's 'Merry Christmas Happy New Year' letters on the wall and have put all the arriving presents under the tree. Plus we have hung up our colorful, long, woolen Afghan stockings, have our leather camels out on the little coffee table and Christmas cards on the window seat. The room *oozes* Christmas spirit! And, being winter in Kabul, we just happen to have fresh snow, so it looks correct outside as well as inside.

We're making plans for another Christmas party. We're writing out the skit and detailing all the necessary food arrangements. Chuck is busy practicing Christmas carols on his guitar and I'm making little leather bookmarks for all the

guests. Dad Ali was relieved to know that this year we didn't have to blow out all the egg-nog eggs!

Big News—Our replacements have arrived! It seems way too early, but they have to go through three months of training and then can transition with us for awhile. We are really lucky to be getting out in May as the new volunteers must sign a twenty-seven month contract! Peace Corps would like everyone to have three months of training, then two full years on the job. At this point twenty-four months seems long enough. I would find starting year three, even if it was only for three months, to be a discouraging task.

We got new windowpanes for our broken windows in the Ministry and they turned on the heat, so we can actually take our coats off now. I don't know if this was just good luck or due to a new Minister. There have been new appointments all around and most Ministries have new Ministers and staffs. Our students tell us that this is a continual rotation and it impedes getting anything done. A bill is proposed and then by the time it's rewritten and discussed and re-written some more, the person who proposed it is out of office and the whole thing dies. They tell us a new bill hasn't been passed in six years. I don't have any idea of what happened with Dr. Dawar, the previous Minister. He never did continue with his English lessons, by the way, told us he was just too busy.

Chuck has applied for grad school at both Denver and Oregon. Denver is more expensive, but has more scholarships. I've written Linda for addresses of school districts in both areas. I'd like to see what teaching positions are open and maybe set up interviews in advance.

I do hope my packages have arrived for your Christmas and that everyone has a wonderful holiday. Sorry this letter is so short but I must hurry if I'm to get this to the mail bag in time.
MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL.
Love, your youngest daughter

December 28, 1972
Dear Mother,

Another wonderful Christmas was had here! The two weeks before Christmas was filled with parties throughout the American community and I think we went out more in ten days than we had all together since we arrived. Our own party was equally fun, another good skit and singing from Mike Hohl, lots of doctored egg-nog and good cheer all around. On Christmas morning we got up bright and early (8:30!), lit a fire in the living room, made some hot tea, spread out a plate of cookies, and commenced with our stockings. Mine contained a candy bar, a small can of mushrooms (very special) a small can of cheese spread, a belt and some small hard candies. Chuck's had Chinese-made hankies, a small jar of peanut butter, candies and some packets of jam. This whole process took almost an hour, since we could each only pull one thing out at a time, praise it lavishly, then ask "how'd you manage to get that!?" And then of course, sip tea and munch on cookies while one of us would tell the whole story on how something was obtained. We then proceeded to the tree where Chuck surprised me with a new leather bag and two English books. I had a new wallet for him and two nifty wood-blocks to hang on the wall. We had a fruitcake from friends and even the Ministry gave gifts—a stone ashtray for Chuck and a lapiz cross necklace for me!

Of course, the real fun was ahead, when we opened all of your packages, which had all arrived in plenty of time! Mom, the underwear for both Chuck and I was really needed—I turned some of Chuck's old briefs into dust-rags that very day! The spices, dressings, Kool-Aid and cocoa are *so* appreciated, especially the rosemary and the chili powder. There is absolutely nothing even similar to chili powder here and I love it because it covers up the taste of the awful beef.

Rita and Linda came through too with a new bra (mine with the safety pin for the back is going to the trash!) a beautiful

1973 calendar, more salad dressings, rubber bands, packaged soups, oatmeal packets, caramels and bacon bits! I hadn't even thought about asking for bacon-bits because I had forgotten they existed. How wonderful of them to think of it! We decided to have one "bit" apiece right on the spot, but hoarded the rest away to parcel out over our iodized tomatoes.

The presents were followed by more tea (*choy*, it's called here) then fresh *non* with new jam! We then took off for camel riding! There had been a man offering to give free rides down at the community church, so we bundled up, jumped on our bikes (it hadn't snowed for a few days so the streets were dry) and headed down there. Churches, by the way, are allowed to exist here as long as they aren't sending out missionaries. This one is mainly for the foreigners and nobody seems to mind it being here.

Camels, up close, are pretty slobbery, stinky and gross. One of the Afghan men helped me on and WHOA—you go way up there! I didn't really ride very far, just around in a circle like a little kid on a pony ride, but I was having a great time. Meanwhile, Chuck was taking all sorts of pictures but wouldn't get on one himself. Said for him, just having me up there was experience enough. Afterwards, we headed off to the Aylwards for Christmas dinner and Darlene, as usual, outdid herself. It was just a wonderful day in every way.

We're leaving for India on the first so the next letter you receive from me should be from a warm verandah in New Delhi. I do hope you had a wonderful Christmas too—I know you are enjoying your Christmas time off and are probably not looking forward to school again. I miss you and love you.
Love, your youngest daughter.

P.S. Happy Birthday Rita—soon you can write me with "Tales from the South Pacific!" Can't wait to hear about it.

January 5, 1973
Dear Mother,

"Clickity-clack, clickity-clack, clickity-clack," hummed the train as we sped overnight from Peshawer to Lahore. I thought I would sleep like a baby but every now and then the train would lurch and I was instantly awake fearing some horrible derailment. The trip from Kabul took a lot longer on the bus than our easy jaunts in the back of the Aylward's VW. Instead of a wave of the hand at the border, the whole bus had to get out and very *s l o w l y* have their papers and passports checked. That alone took three hours but it passed quickly as it was engrossing to watch the Kuchi tribes going by and all the armed rebel guys strolling around. The Kuchis, by the way, don't have to go through customs. Off to the side there is a sign, painted with a big outline of a camel and person walking and has a big arrow pointing to a path—basically to say if you're on or with a camel, go this way. It saves everybody time especially since these tribes are illiterate, have no papers, identity cards or anything else. I guess if you wanted to sneak across the border you could just mix in with them. Of course you'd then have to walk around Pakistan for the next three months until they crossed back!

We ate dinner at Jan's, then caught the night train to Lahore. We arrived in Lahore bright and early then spent over an hour dragging our bags to four different hotels before we found one that was cheap enough and clean enough. Once checked in we had the day to ourselves since the border to India wasn't open until the next day. We toured a museum with some very old and precious miniature paintings and an impressive figure of a skinny Buddha, towards the end of his six-year fast! We then went to the Lahore Zoo, which was quite nice, especially in comparison to the one in Kabul.

Remember how I used to tell you that the thing I wanted most in the world was a chimpanzee? And how I was going to

dedicate an entire bedroom in my house (when I was a grown-up!) for this monkey, complete with tropical foliage? I think not. And if I hadn't had come to that decision before, the chimps in the Lahore zoo would have settled the matter. Two in particular were have this fur-pulling fight, screeching at the top of their lungs, when suddenly the larger one lunged at the smaller one, grabbed his hand, and completely bit off a finger! Horrors! You've never seen such blood and screaming! The little one retreated to the corner where he was soon picked up by a zookeeper who had heard the commotion. Meanwhile, Mr. Bully Chimp took a big drink of water, strolled to the edge of the cage and spat it out on everyone within spitting distance. Happily, by then, we had retreated to the rear of the crowd.

Our evening's entertainment was a little calmer. We went to a movie theater where they were showing REAL ENGLISH MOVIES and got box seats up in the family section—pretty cool. They have the same set-up in Kabul theaters, families and women in one section and bachelors separated off in another.

We found the city of Lahore to be surprisingly hostile. I was hissed at several times and this was with wearing long pants, a long sleeved shirt and a top that went to mid-thigh. I did not have my head covered so I guess that was the point of contention. Hotel personnel were rude, along with waiters and all we got on the street were unfriendly glances from men. There were hardly any women about even though this is a modern city. I thought all of Pakistan would have the same charming laid-back atmosphere of Peshawer, but no, instead it seems to be a hotbed of Muslim fundamentalism. One would think that a poor country like Afghanistan would be *more* religious than a more developed neighbor, but it doesn't hold true here. Maybe the Afghans are so concerned with survival, religion takes a back seat. Or maybe they just put up with us more because they need that Yankee dollar. We do get hassled in Afghanistan, but rarely on the downtown streets and even in the back areas, the level is nothing compared to here.

We got up early to make the border crossing to India and hoped for the best. Other volunteers had told us it took them fourteen hours to get across, but Buddha smiled on us and we were across in three, in time for lunch at good old Mrs. Bendarie's. Having an American passport was especially nice. We went through with just a quick look and customary questions. Fellow travelers from Afghanistan and Pakistan were getting the third degree as their bags were rifled through while the guards screamed at them. One poor sap ahead of us did something wrong or said something wrong and his border guard picked up his bag, grabbed the lid with one hand and the bottom with the other, and threw the entire contents out in the street! He was still out picking up his underwear when we passed thankfully into India.

We're taking a night train to Delhi in a few hours and will go directly to Mrs. Johnson's B and B, where this time, we have reservations. I'll write next week.
Love, your youngest daughter

January 11, 1973
Dear Mother,

I am sitting on another verandah, this one in front of our *pensione* here in New Delhi, an old home owned by an Indian woman named Mrs. Johnson. Although close to the center of things, it's on a neighborhood street filled with large trees and I'm enjoying my shady spot here, curled up in an old wicker chair with faded flower cushions. I'm remembering the comment someone made back in Coeur d'Alene about India before we left. "Dirty, horrible, disgusting," I believe were the adjectives. And I sit here thinking how beautiful and wonderful it is. It's all a matter of perspective and after life in Afghanistan, this seems like the Garden of Eden. I loved it last year when we were here and it's just as wonderful this year. I find myself staring at the women in their saris and thinking how lovely they all look, young and old. I love the warmth in the air and

the jumble of bicycles, cars and rickshaws in the streets. I love the big lazy white Brahma bulls that munch on leaves wherever they feel like it and the chirping of thousands of birds every morning at dawn. And I especially love the freedom to walk outside in a sleeveless shirt! Mrs. Johnson runs a comfortable inn, but she's very particular about your water usage. Her facility only offers bucket showers and you have to haul your own bucket of water down a long hall from the spigot to the bath. You have to get the bucket and the permission from Mrs. Johnson before you trek to the spigot and she is there to make sure you use *one* and *only one* bucket. Mrs. J. also practices open discrimination. If she doesn't like your looks, you can't stay here. We were standing by the reception desk this morning when she blatantly told two scraggly W.T's that there was no more room, when we know for a fact that there are several vacant rooms. I guess we were clean-cut enough to meet her requirements. We probably wouldn't stay here again, (would enjoy a two-bucket shower!) but it is clean, cheap, well-located and does have a variety of interesting guests from various countries.

The Taj Mahal absolutely took my breath away. So many times you are led to believe something is "great" only to be disappointed when you finally see it. That wasn't the case here. All the stories we had heard about how beautiful it was, were inadequate. It is simply the most stunning piece of architecture you can imagine. When you first see it from a distance, you are struck by the beauty of its symmetry, it's openness and it's white color against the blue sky. It makes you want to come closer and the closer you get the more exquisite it becomes. As you are drawn in, you realize it's not really white, but a creamy color because each block of stone is a slightly different hue, which gives it a richness and depth. Then, closer still, you can examine the intricate carvings and gorgeous inlaid work found on thousands of the panels.

You just can't look at it enough. We wandered around for hours, soaking in impressions from every angle and distance

and tried to engrave our brains with its image. I learned that it was built as a tomb (you probably already knew this) by a Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan for his second wife, who died after giving birth to their fourteenth (!) child. According to the story they were very much in love and she went everywhere with him, pregnant or not. It took him twenty-two years and the labor of twenty thousand men to finally complete it in 1653. I tried to think back to what was going on in the United States at the same time, to give it some kind of perspective, but I couldn't come up with much for 1650, since we were hardly more than a few eastern settlements. It amazes me that while we were simple towns in the forest, this huge other civilization was going on, with Moguls and Emperors clashing swords and retreating to walled cities!

We went to Agra, where the Taj is located, on an early morning bullet train from Delhi so had the entire day to spend there. We spent most of the morning at the Taj, then split the afternoon between the Great Agra Fort across the river and the nearby city-palace of Fatehpur Sikri. Both of these places are also incredible due to the size and the unbelievable detail of stone carving. Whole stone walls are carved as intricately as lace–one small panel could take a man months or even years to complete. There is another great Red Fort in Delhi that has a night sound and light show. We went to this and were not only thoroughly entertained but also got a feel for the history and time. When we haven't been ogling over the architecture, we've been shopping a bit and checked out the New Delhi Zoo, famous for their white Bengal tigers. It gets high marks. Almost all the enclosures are completely natural, with the animals separated by moats or vegetation.

It's been a wonderful vacation but it feels too short. We sat out on the verandah last night and both confessed to dreading our return to freezing Kabul and all of its restrictions. Chuck told me he's really getting tired of teaching and the sameness of it all. I understand now why teachers need a whole summer off to recharge their batteries. This past two weeks hasn't been

enough. We head back tomorrow, planning a three day bus and train trip and we may try to see a different city in Pakistan—hopefully one more pleasant than Lahore.

It will be fun to check our mail when we get back and see how Christmas was for everybody. Hope the New Year is off to a good start. For us, being here was the best start ever!

Love, your youngest daughter

P.S. We took Chuck's wedding band to a jeweler to have it soldered, but find that it's now too small. Either it lost some diameter with the sawing or Chuck's finger still hasn't returned to its former size. We were disappointed, (me more than Chuck) but think we'll now wait and see about getting it enlarged when we get back to the States.

January 20, 1973
Dear Mother,

Well, I'm not on anybody's verandah this afternoon. Instead I write huddled up to our wood stove in the living room, watching it snow. It had melted a bit when we got home, then we had a cold spell with lows around seven degrees, now it's warmer (I'm guessing about thirty degrees) with snow. Our ever-versatile sleeping bags are now doubling as quilts on our bed.

New Delhi seems a long ways away. We had a smooth trip home, got through the Indian-Pakistan border easily and stopped in both Lahore and Rawlpindi in Pakistan. Managed to be insulted in both cities and caught colds. We don't have any Peace Corps volunteers in Pakistan—good thing, as they seem extremely intolerant of any foreigner and dangerously zealous. We were actually relieved to get back into Afghanistan.

Our students were crazy to see us again and anxious to resume their English. They loved hearing about India and I've had a lot of fun with the advanced students describing our vacation. I slowly tell them about something, then they have to

ask another student what I said and that student has to retell the story. Great practice for their past tenses!

Last week we also had our first meeting with our designated replacements, the Perezes from Alabama. They seem excited and eager to begin, plus they both have had teaching experience so they should do well.

Our mail-box was full when we made it over to the Peace Corps office and it was so wonderful to have letters from everyone. I'm so pleased that our boxes arrived and there was an Afghan present for each of you. I'm excited for Rita and Pat on their Navy assignment in Guam, but I will really miss seeing them when we get back. Mom, I guess you don't have much sympathy for women who just complain that their children live out of state, hey? We also got a letter from Aref, one of our favorite students from last year who is now in a Christian (!) University in Texas. He tells us that all is going well and thanked us for all the information and help on learning American customs and English. I hope we can keep in touch, I would love to know what happens to him.

This is a time of waiting for us. We are waiting to hear where Chuck is accepted for graduate school, I am waiting to apply to school districts, we are waiting to hear if our shipment with the doctor will ever get there, and we are waiting to receive our final termination date. Our supervisor now tells us he didn't have the authority to say we could leave early, even with replacements, so now that has to be re-cleared through the higher-ups. I hope it still holds. Two months with nothing to do would not be fun.

We had a small tremble through here yesterday—sent us scrambling outside and knocked a little snow off here and there. These tremors never amount to much but given the mud and stick construction of our home, going outside seems prudent.

Not much else to report. Don't worry if you don't hear from me for a few weeks. Hopefully by my next letter maybe we'll have news on some front.

Keep warm, hope classes are going smoothly and the winter is mild.
Love, your youngest daughter

February 20, 1973
Dear Mother,

The Perezes, our replacements, left yesterday! We had been working with them at the Ministry for the past three weeks and we thought they were doing fine, but they came in the Ministry yesterday with the simple news of "thank-you-for-all-your-help-but-we're-leaving." We didn't have a chance to talk to them about it, they had already decided and had their tickets home. They wouldn't give us a specific reason why, just said it was a combination of things. It's frustrating for us as now we will have to train new volunteers, assuming we get new ones! Meanwhile our departure has been confirmed for April 20th, so I hope they can pull another couple from the last cycle. It seems odd to me that they could decide so quickly that they didn't want to be volunteers—didn't really give it a chance. Our students aren't unhappy about it—this means we will be with them in the classroom longer. I'm sure they would have grown to like the Perezes just as much as they like us, but there wasn't enough time.

Great News! Chuck has been accepted at the University of Oregon and I have already mailed letters to various school districts in Eugene to see if I can apply for any teaching positions. It feels so good to have a destination and a plan. Now all of the answers we had been waiting for have been answered, except for whatever happened to our shipment with the good doctor and that can wait until we get home. We're now absorbed in organizing our tour home. We know that we want to fly directly to Greece and spend a considerable amount of time out on one of the islands, maybe Mykonos or Tinos. After that we may stop in Switzerland, then plan on spending at least a week with my college roommate, Elizabeth, on the Isle of Mann. We

also want to spend some time in London and see lots of theatre. We hear it's very cheap to get last minute tickets to the matinees.

Meanwhile, back in the here and now, we've had our second wedding anniversary. The occasion called for a night out so we went out to an Italian restaurant called Tretonis for a super large pizza. It didn't taste anything like pizza at home, but was different and a welcome change from my pressure-cooked meat. At the restaurant we ran into the Aylwards, who were finishing their meal, and we chatted a while. When we left we found that they had paid our bill. Those guys are just too good to us! We also got a congratulatory bottle of wine from the Stewarts, our other friends from the Ministry team.

Winter continues—still a fair amount of snow and slush everywhere. Last year it continued off and on until the end of March and then turned into spring overnight.

As you can see, I'm out of news. Can't wait for the weather to warm up some so we can bike back to work. I've noticed my hips seem larger after all that good food we ate in India.

Much love, your youngest, fattest daughter

March 2, 1973

Dear Mother,

We had a break in the weather last week, almost a spring day, so on Friday we went down to the main bazaar with big Ed, a fellow member of our cycle, to shop for various household items and possible souvenirs to take home. Big Ed *is* big—about six foot five or six and stout. If I were ever to rub a magic lantern and have a genie come out, Ed is exactly what I would expect. Up until Friday, Ed had also had the distinction of being one of the few volunteers that had never been pickpocketed or had had anything stolen. But, even the mighty shall fall! We had taken the bus to the bazaar and had met Ed at one of the main entrances since he had ridden his bike. The three of us were walking together though the bazaar when we

decided to go in one of the shops. Chuck and I went ahead while Ed reminded behind—we thought to lock up his bike. He walked in behind us a few minutes later and then suddenly got this startled look on his face, then turned and ran back out. We followed of course, wondering what was going on. Ed stood there shaking his head, "I can't believe what I just did, I can't believe it." He sighed. "I just gave a kid one hundred Afghanies to watch my bike." We burst out laughing.

"No," Chuck said, "You just gave an Afghan kid one hundred Afghanies to *take* your bike." Of course the bike and the kid were long gone. It was such a stupid and elementary mistake—Ed had just gotten too complacent. He spent the rest of the morning shaking his head and muttering to himself.

We saw several scribes in the bazaar and I made a note to myself to tell you about them. I don't know what percentage of the country is illiterate, but it's fairly high, especially outside of the larger cities. This has produced the scribe business. Actually, they are not just in the bazaar, but often found on any street squatting against a building, usually with a small table or box in front and an assortment of papers, held down by a rock. An illiterate can hire them to read something they received or to write something for them. I think they also keep a Koran with them to read passages. You have to hand it to these people for their entrepreneurial spirit.

Other interesting street news includes a new woman beggar just down from the Ministry. She keeps a small baby on a blanket and begs for help, pointing to her baby. Since we pass every day, we thought it was rather odd that this infant never moves or cries. We had to look closely to see if it was even alive. Our students tell us she drugs the baby, but how can you tell? It could also just be dying of something. Most small babies here don't move because the Afghan women completely bind their infants when they're out and about—the pathetic little things are tightly wrapped like mummies. They remind me a little of an Indian papoose, but they're not mounted on a

board. I see them on the buses all the time and it drives me crazy when I see two or three flies in the corner of their eyes.

The mother (almost always wearing a *chadrie*) isn't doing anything about it (or can't see them!) and the poor kid can't even raise its little arm to shoo them away. I don't know where this binding practice comes from—I guess they think it's helping or protecting their bones in some way. Anyway, back to my story, we haven't been giving the mother any coins on the chance that she does drug the baby. Giving money to the beggars is always a problem for me. On the one hand, I don't want to see them dependent on begging and on the other hand, many of them have no other choices. Unlike the USA, there don't seem to be any shelters or helping services for the street people. And if a woman was kicked out of her home, (probably unfairly) what on earth could she do? The Muslims routinely give all beggars money; I think they believe it helps them into heaven. Maybe that's a better policy instead of trying to determine who is really desperate and who is not. Heck, they're all desperate!

Must go and soak the rice and put on a warmer layer of clothes. Remember that I'll be thinking of you on your birthday. Next year I'll be able to be there or at least have a gift in the mail.

Love, your youngest daughter

March 20, 1973

Dear Mother,

Time is running through our fingers now and we're trying not to panic when we see what's left on the "to do" list. We have been working with our new replacements, the Witts, at the ministry. They are both vegetarians, which may make it difficult for them here since cheese and milk are so hard to come by. Oh well, not my problem. They do seem to be doing well and getting into life at the ministry. We have also found two new single volunteer guys, Dan and Don, who want to buy

all the stuff in our house and take over the rent on April 15th. That will work out as we will spend our last five days with the Aylwards. That works for Mike and Darlene since they were leaving on their vacation on the 16th and we can watch the house for a few days.

Even better, the new volunteers want to keep Dad Ali on with the same work schedule and salary. This is the best news of all since we didn't want to leave him without a job. Dad Ali is delighted, of course, but every time we talk about it, we all get so choked up with tears we can't go on. We've gotten so close to him and I feel like we're abandoning him to a very uncertain future. Of course, it's uncertain for everyone here. None of our students have much of a future with the ministry and there are really no jobs for college graduates. I believe that if they can get scholarships out of here they will do everything they can not to return. Nik Mohammed told us that one side of him wanted to stay and try and help the country, but the other side of him says, "Why sacrifice your life? This country is too far behind to be saved." I certainly can't tell him what to do. I think how lucky we are to be born Americans and not have to leave our country to have an opportunity.

We have also found a wonderful American family to take Augie-doggie. I don't like to think about that either, as I've grown to love that little dog and his crazy way of jumping, wagging his tail and running in circles when we come home. This family has school age children and I know they will give him tons of attention and love. Plus, being Embassy personnel, he'll get REAL dog food, not just our bread and hamburger mixture. And who knows, maybe they can take him back to the States or at least find a new family when their tour is over. I now have a better appreciation of how Donna felt about leaving her dog but I prefer to let Augie-doggie take his chances. He is so darn cute I think he will always find a family to care for him.

Chuck got a second acceptance at the University in Denver! Nice to have two, but we're going ahead with Oregon. It's

cheaper and closer to home. Denver offered more scholarships but those might be hard or impossible to get this late in the year. I did hear back from the Eugene Oregon school district, about drama/English teaching positions. Basically, there aren't any! I'm not going to worry though as I feel I can find something with substituting or something.

We still have to see about shipping a box of things out of here and getting all our final papers and medical exams. I'm planning on giving most of my clothes away. They are all worn out but can be used by people here. I'll take just enough to travel and buy new when we get home. I wish I had more to give, some of the children here in our neighborhood are so poor—barefoot most of the time and just one raggedy outfit to their names. It makes me cringe when I think of the children back in the States with closets full of unused toys and clothes. Speaking of which, I'm reminded of a little boy in our neighborhood who recently acquired an old bicycle. It's not in good shape, but does have two wheels, handlebars, a seat and it does roll. The problem for the little boy is that it's a man's bicycle, with the bar across the top. He is too small to straddle the bar, but does that deter him? No. He has learned how to contort himself under the bar so both feet are on the pedals, then he twists his back to fit under the bar to the left and then reaches way across the top of the bar to get his right hand on the right handlebar. If I hadn't seen him riding around I would have said it would be impossible to do it.

Must run, tons to do. I'm getting so excited!!
Love, your youngest daughter

April 1, 1973
Dear Mother,

It wasn't until I wrote the date on this letter that I remembered it was April Fool's Day. Here, without the prompting of advertising neither Chuck or I remembered it. We completely

forgot Valentine's Day and I have no idea when Easter is coming– or has it past?

Remember me telling you about the older volunteer named Charlie Motsch? The time spent here has not improved his disposition towards Afghanistan. I think more than any of us, he wants to leave. He stopped by the house to visit the other day and on leaving, we were talking outside of our gate in the street. "Afghans are scavengers," he complained. "They'll pick up any type of garbage, even this." And with that, he ripped his broken generator off the back wheel of his bike and tossed it in the *jewie*. At that exact second, one of those children who wear the cans on their back and pick up trash, appeared around the corner, saw the shiny generator in the *jewie* and promptly picked it up and put it in his can. Charlie stood there dumbfounded, so stunned to see his point made he could hardly think of what to say. "See… *see*, what'd I tell you!" he stammered. We couldn't contain our laughter, which got Charlie started and then the three of us just stood there laughing until tears were running from our eyes. Charlie is not sure what he wants to do after Peace Corps, maybe go work in Saudi Arabia. As much as he complains about Afghanistan, he has nothing good to say about the States either and has no real desire to go back. Unfortunately, he has spent so many years working abroad that no place really seems like home.

I've been in a contemplative mood today, thinking back on what we've done here. I'm pleased with all of our work at the Ministry and our handbook on American culture but I regret that I haven't been able to make any close female Afghan friends. I can't decide if it's because I didn't try hard enough or because it's difficult to be close when there are so many differences. Conversations always died on the vine once we got off the topics of family and weather. When we spoke of the future, it was always depressing since my future is so bright and theirs is so limited. If they're lucky, they'll be able to keep their miserly Ministry jobs which will never lead anywhere. The women in my classes were single and hoped to marry some

day but at present none of them had any prospects and I think not being from wealthy families didn't help the matter. It was impossible to do things together since they don't ride bicycles and there are no places where we could play outdoor games together or swim or hike or do much of anything. Most of them just knit, cook or do housework when they are not at the Ministry. I wish things were different for them, but I can't change it. My only consolation is that maybe with English, they can read a wider variety of books and expand their horizons in that way.

One of our new students comes from a family that has a restaurant, so he is organizing a farewell dinner for us. We're trying to keep the whole departure thing low-key as we don't want the students thinking they have to give us anything. Number one, they can't afford it and number two, after we send our box home this week, we don't want to carry any more with us than we have to. With all of the planned stops, we want to lug the minimum amount of baggage.

We'll be in the classroom with the Witts for two more weeks, then will officially turn it over. We're praying that they like it here and will at least come and talk to us about any problems *before* deciding anything drastic.

Not much more to add. The weather has been beautiful lately—wonderful spring days. Our patch of crab-grass is looking green and there are even some hardy flowers poking up in my front flower bed.
Love, your youngest daughter

April 14, 1973
Dear Mother,

This is the last night here in our little house. I have been excited for weeks about leaving, but now that it's so close, I'm depressed. Our house, Dad Ali, the students, the friends, Augie-doggie—all will now pass out of our lives forever. True, we can keep in touch with the friends and could even travel back here, I suppose, but it would never be the same as living

here. It has been such an extraordinary two years and such a great way to start our lives together, the future now seems scary. Chuck and I looked at each other last night and wondered if these first two years will be the best years of our marriage? Will it all be downhill from here? Will we ever again have two years where we are given such challenges? And what of our efforts here the last two years? Did we do any good? Will speaking English ever help these people? Are we only aiding them to escape from this country? Maybe I can answer some of those questions in fifty years.

Whether or not I've changed any lives here, I have changed my own. Having seen how happy we can be with so little, I don't think I'll be satisfied with a life that is just about acquiring possessions. That may also come in part from the way we were raised, but this time here has certainly reinforced it. I also realize I have the strength to do or be anything I want to be. I grew up thinking I would be a teacher, but living here, I see how many opportunities there might be outside of teaching, outside of Coeur d'Alene, and outside of the United States! And if I was ignorant about central Asia, I am equally ignorant about every place else. My desire for travel and adventure hasn't been satisfied; it has been ignited.

On the here and now practical front, we have done all our paperwork and we finish up our medical clearance this week. We have our plane tickets to Athens in hand and the bags are nearly packed. We had our good-bye dinner and party with the students and no one brought us anything, which was a blessing. They had a huge buffet with the customary *pilau* and as usual everyone just stood at the table gobbling everything within reach. We gave a speech (in Farsi) thanking them all for their kindness and patience and enthusiasm for learning. Nik Mohammed stood up for them and told us (in English) how much they had appreciated our work and how they wished us success in our futures. That was followed by hugs and handshaking and not a few tears. I still want to cry when I think about it. It's been a week for crying, that's for sure. We had our last cry and

hug with Dad Ali this afternoon and I can barely stand to think about it. We took Augie-doggie to his new family last week and I cried all the way home. The only thing that hasn't been tearful was another stressful trip to the post office to send home our box full of souvenirs and gifts. It should get there in about a month.

As usual, I'm sitting here in my place against the wall (I have completely rubbed the paint off of this spot!) listening to the evening call to prayer. How many nights have I sat here dreaming of *this* evening? Now that it's here, all the time behind has compressed together and it seems like only yesterday when I sat on this much rounder cushion for the first time. I wish time were tangible so I could box up these two years and then be able to take out a day at a time to live again. Instead, on some quiet afternoon years from today, I'll just have to open what dusty memories I have in my head and hope to be able to see our dear Dad Ali, the faces of our wonderful students, and walk though our gate where Augie-doggie will be wagging his tail.

I love you. I miss you. I'm coming home.

Love, your youngest daughter

Epilogue

Thirty-one years have now passed and I was right about a couple of things. Being in Afghanistan with the Peace Corps changed our direction in life. We never went back to become teachers in Coeur d'Alene and our passion for foreign travel didn't go away. We worked overseas twice more, once with a private company in Kuwait and once again with the Peace Corps in Paraguay. Those sojourns were thirty years apart and in between we followed a career of finance—something I never could have imagined. I had fretted that after those exciting two first years all the rest of my life might be anti-climatic, but I need not have worried. While the Afghan years remain very special in our memories, they were not our *only* best years. Life has given us many wonderful years of challenge, adventure and fun.

And did we do any good in Afghanistan? Perhaps a little. I feel confident that the years of fighting with Russia drove many educated Afghans out of the country, and speaking some English had to be helpful. I do know that both Aref and Nik Mohammed attended Texas Universities and I suspect they would have done everything possible to remain in this country.

We were never able to stay in contact with any of our students so I have no idea of what has happened to them, or what has happened to Dad Ali. I doubt that English would have helped them much with the Russians, but maybe, if they can remember it, they are using it to some advantage today. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to remember my Farsi. What little I had retained, I lost when I began studying Spanish ten years ago. They say it would come back to me if I went back and started using it again but then my Spanish would probably

using it again but then my Spanish would probably disappear. Multilingual I am not.

Reading about Afghanistan was a heartache long before the Taliban arrived on the scene. The King fell from power the summer after we left and the government began to unravel from that point. Once the Russians invaded, we saw sporadic news reports portraying destruction and horrible pictures of children with missing limbs. There was one particular picture in a magazine showing a block of Kabul where we used to bicycle past, blown to bits. I found it so depressing I didn't want to even see the stories when friends pointed them out to me. After the Russians finally left, the emergence of the Taliban wasn't a surprise. While the name was new to me, the power and domination of the mullahs was not. They had always held all the power in the provinces and held themselves accountable to no one. It was logical that they would come together, seize control and impose their interpretation of Islam on everyone else. I couldn't even start to imagine how difficult that must have been for our now middle-aged students, finding themselves completely stripped of freedom and even limited opportunities. And adding insult to injury, after centuries of defeating foreign aggressors, they had their own people turn into the worst oppressors of all!

Our hunt for Osama Bin Laden has at least resulted in freeing Afghans from these religious extremists and perhaps now, with everyone aware of the plight of the people and especially the women, something can be done. I see that as the one bright light after thirty years of tragedy. But, as you can tell from my letters, things were not wonderful thirty years ago before all of this started. There was never an adequate infrastructure, the economy was in shambles, there wasn't a renewable source of fuel and the disease and illiteracy rate were staggering. These are problems that are now worse than ever and will be difficult to solve without a stable government. Throwing money at the problems won't help either since it will only go into the pockets of the men at the top of the pyramid. It will take years of

dedicated work by the Afghans to even get back to the miserable conditions they had in 1970. I would like to be more optimistic and I do believe without the Taliban their lives will improve, but I see enormous obstacles ahead.

While we were not able to keep in touch with any of our Afghan friends, we did keep in touch with many of our Peace Corps and USAID friends and have communicated with them regularly over the years. Perhaps with this book I'll be able to establish contact with others and who knows, maybe we'll hear from Aref or Nik Mohammed. Friends ask if I plan to go back and visit Afghanistan and I'm pretty sure the answer is no. I'm afraid I'd be like old Charlie, looking for the past and comparing everything to the way it was. In my place I would send a new volunteer, one who could accept the country as it is now and see it as a land ready for a new beginning—*enshalla*.

Dear Mother
We are here. We are safe...

About the Book:

The year was 1971. No one had ever heard of Afghanistan and no one cared. The Russians hadn't invaded and the Taliban didn't exist. Eloise Hanner now takes us back to a simpler time and shares her story as a young teacher, living in Afghanistan as an American Peace Corps volunteer.

In a tearful good-bye, Hanner promised her mother she would write and she was good to her word, faithfully sending weekly letters describing the wonderful flavor of *non*, the colorful *Kuchi* caravans and the journeys through the Kyber Pass. In a combination of hilarity and frustration her letters bring to life the challenges she and her husband faced, living as young volunteers in a culture that was both hospitable and hostile.

These timely letters are a riveting narrative of the exotic as well as a diary of domestic life. They take us on a magic carpet ride back to a small adobe house in Kabul, and let us experience for ourselves the people and the customs of Afghanistan.

About the Author

Eloise Hanner was raised in the small town of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho and graduated cum laude from the University of Idaho in 1971. After working and living abroad both in Afghanistan and Kuwait, she started a career as a stockbroker in San Diego. She retired early in 1998, at the age of forty-eight, to bicycle across the United States. The story of that ride became her first book, *The First Big Ride—A Woman's Journey*. Following a return to the Peace Corps in Paraguay, she and her husband Chuck settled in Sarasota, Florida.

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